

# Azam Gill

Blood Money

# **BLOOD MONEY**

**BY**

**AZAM GILL**



**BeWrite Books, UK**

**[www.bewrite.net](http://www.bewrite.net)**

Published internationally by BeWrite Books, UK.  
363 Badminton Road, Nibley, Bristol. BS37 5JF.

© Azam Gill 2002

The right of Azam Gill to be identified as the author has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. The right of Azam Gill to be recognized as the sole author is further asserted in accordance with international copyright agreements, laws and statutes.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1-904224-90-3

Also available in paperback and cd-rom formats from  
[www.bewrite.net](http://www.bewrite.net)

Digitally produced by BeWrite Books

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's consent in any form other than this current form and without a similar condition being imposed upon a subsequent purchaser. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the permission of the publisher, BeWrite Books, UK.

This book is a work of fiction. Any similarity between characters in its pages and persons living or dead is unintentional and co-incidental. The author and publishers recognize and respect any trademarks included in this work by introducing such registered titles either in italics or with a capital letter.

Cover art by Caitlin Myers.

It is the proud boast of la Légion Etrangere that it never needs to call upon outsiders, no matter what skills it requires. Veteran legionnaire Azam Gill has once more proved that boast well-founded. He has shown great skill in writing a first-class thriller with authentic backgrounds that take the action around the world. He deserves to be a notable success.

**LEN DEIGHTON**

In Asia, a network of cells and support structures remains virtually intact both before and after 11 September. As terrorist support networks do not pose a direct and imminent threat to the security of host countries, many countries tolerate their presence and are reluctant to act against them. Support cell members operate through innocuous political, human rights, socio-economic, welfare, humanitarian, educational and cultural organizations.

***DR ROHAN GUNARATNA. Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence. University of St Andrews, UK. JANE'S INTELLIGENCE REVIEW. 2002.***

The blond flicked his tongue over his lips like a snake's.

He took two steps forward and bent to pick up the bags. His eyes were on Johnny's hands instead of his eyes, so he didn't see the kick that caught him under the chin and nearly ripped his head off. Before his body touched the ground, Johnny neatly vaulted over it and turned to put himself behind the Arab who had been on his right. The Arab was still in mid-turn when Johnny pivoted and smashed the sole of his left foot into his tibia. Before the scream could emerge from his open mouth, the heel of Johnny's left foot stamped, ground and twisted the metacarpals of the Arab's foot. He passed out with the pain.

Johnny sensed rather than heard the swish of the switchblade behind him. He ducked and the blade *schii-icked* over his head. He reached back and pulled the third thug's feet from under him. In falling, the other Arab lost the knife, which Johnny kicked away. He stood over the man.

"Now listen to me. Tell all your hard friends. I just finished a contract with the Légion. There're at least a hundred and fifty Légion veterans in town. I plan to live in this quartier. Next time it won't be bare hands. It'll be machine-guns and grenades. *T'a compris?*"

"*Oui.*"

"*Oui quoi?*"

"*Oui monsieur!*"

"Now take your buddies and fuck out of my sight before I change my mind and chuck you on the live wires of the tram!"

In a rented room overlooking the scene, Pétard's blue eyes crinkled in satisfaction. The toughs had been well paid for the beating they had taken. Miloud would be crippled for life, but that was too bad. The clinical violence had been cleanly recorded on video from an overlooking office. The Schengen Group had the evidence it needed. The operation was rolling well. And he would retire next week to his idyllic little cottage on a palm-fronted beach in New Caledonia.



Azam Gill is an academic and a warrior.

This book is based on his first-hand experience of front line fighting, covert commando operations and under-cover intelligence work ... and on a seemingly incongruous lifetime's love-story with literature, study and teaching.

Now a French citizen, he was born in Pakistan, the son of a renowned jurist father and a talented playwright and educationalist mother.

Fluent in Punjabi and Urdu, Gill claims English as his mother tongue (the language his family spoke at home). He speaks other Western languages including French. He was educated in English schools and colleges run by British and Americans. He gained his BA from Forman Christian College of the Punjab University in English literature and Political Science.

Accepted as a 'gentleman cadet' at the Pakistan Military Academy, he passed out among the top 10% of his graduation year and was commissioned to a light infantry battalion of the Punjab Regiment in Kashmir. He also obtained his paratrooper's wings. In Kashmir, one of the world's flash-points, Gill and his troops lived in underground

earthen bunkers, crossing snake- and rain-filled crawl trenches and minefields as part of daily routine. The Kashmir border is known for a war of attrition involving intensive patrolling, fire fights, artillery duels ... and a chilling casualty rate.

He successively served as Intelligence Officer, Company Commander and Regimental Adjutant. He was also in charge of the crossing of spies through his sector.

Later, he received a Master's in English Language and Literature from the Punjab University. He published a pamphlet, *Jail Reforms*, and a book, *Army Reforms*. Although *Jail Reforms* was on the syllabus of the Prisons Training Academy, both books were seized and burnt by the authorities.

One of his former instructors was the late President Zia ul Haq's private secretary. He called Gill to Islamabad and warned him that he should leave the country before his imminent arrest for angering the authorities by his writing. Harassed, seeking protection and a new life, Gill decided to take the advice – he followed in the footsteps of the beggars and princes who have served in the ranks of the French Foreign Légion.

After basic training, he was posted to the 1er Régiment Etranger de Cavalerie, and granted the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron and became the first Légionnaire to gain a PhD, which he received from Grenoble University.

At the end of his Légion contract, Gill worked as a language teacher and became a lecturer at Grenoble University's Polytechnic. He was then seconded to the French Navy, where he now teaches English. During this period, he also wrote a monthly column on Geopolitics for *The National Educator*, a Californian monthly paper. His articles have been published in book form with an exhaustive bibliography and index under the title *Winds of Change: Geopolitics and the World Order*, available at Amazon.com.

His hobbies include reading, writing, cooking, swimming and French Savate Boxing. Gill, in his forties, lives in France with his wife and three young children.



*Azam Gill, as European Bureau Chief on Geopolitics for California's prestigious 'The National Educator', has written scores of insightful articles. His works, 'Jail Reforms' and 'Army Reforms' were published in 1978 by the People's Publishing House, Lahore, Pakistan. They are now black-listed by the authorities. His groundbreaking academic book, 'Winds of Change: Geopolitics and the World Order' was released through iUniverse in 2001.*

***His painstaking research for 'Blood Money' turned up facts as strange as any fiction. Those facts can be found at the end of this novel.***

*“Modern-day Islamists are certainly good at spinning a global web”* – The Economist, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996.

*“The Group of Seven are planning to hit back at terrorists ... and create centers of excellence in anti-terrorist expertise”* – The European, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1996.

*“Contemporary terrorist groups operate internationally through front, cover and sympathetic organizations ... The most effective strategy is to disrupt terrorist infrastructures when in their formative phase”* – Jane’s Intelligence Review, August 2000.

To the French Foreign Légionnaires,  
nameless foreign-born sons of mothers who are loyal  
to their salt.

## THANKS

During the act of writing, my wife Miranda and the children for letting me get on with it, and Trevor Greenhill, my brother-in-law, for reading an unfinished draft. During the act of re-writing, Jean-Louis and Isabelle Ricciardelli for lending me the solitude of their loving home. Jean-Christophe Leveque, for helping me with the research. The multi-media center of the Grenoble Polytechnique, especially Alain Trinh, and David Bailey for all his help, encouragement and hospitality. At EOLAS, Grenoble, the Dulac brothers, one of whom, Simon, is no longer with us, and Jacques Timonier for all their affectionate help. The Editor-in-Chief of *The National Educator*, Muazzam Gill, for more than I can mention. The French Foreign Légion, my unit, 1er Régiment Etranger de Cavalerie, and 1er Escadron, for the grace and dignity with which I was handled. Warrant Officer Muniz, my platoon commander in the Légion, and Niel, Brie, Müller, Hans, Poupa and Karnail Singh, platoon mates and fellow Légionnaires with whom I 'did' Africa. The Veteran Légionnaires Association of the Department of Isère, for their comradeship and brotherhood, and the confidence they displayed in me by unanimously electing me secretary. Monsieur Coreard, former member of the French Resistance in Grenoble during World War II. Lt. Colonel Hamadani of Paksitan's Inter Services Intelligence, for instruction in a ransom operation. Neil Marr, editor of BeWrite Books, without whose professional expertise, literary grasp, vast experience of writing, and gifted man management, this book might never have seen the light of day.

# **BLOOD MONEY**



## CHAPTER ONE

*First Foreign Regiment*  
*– French Foreign Légion Headquarters, Aubagne.*  
*End of Contract.*

In stonewashed jeans, Nikes and a brown leather jacket, he walked along the Allée Viennot, rucksack slung easily over his left shoulder. For the last time his eyes blazed a silent salute to the monument of the dead – four Légionnaires back-to-back in colonial pith helmets leaning over their long-barreled rifles with sword bayonets.

A wasp buzzed past his ear. He half-turned his head, and the periphery of his vision outlined the Légion Museum. Not a man to give in to impulses, he had allowed himself to be invited by Warrant Officer Pfeiffer, the chief curator, for a drink. He might never come back again. Lithely, he went down the fifty-seven steps to the parade ground, a fighting fit, elite soldier at the end of his five-year contract. A staff captain was coming up the steps. The Légionnaire stiffened, stared hard into the eyes of his officer and slapped his thigh in the Légion's bareheaded salute. The sharp crack

## BLOOD MONEY

reverberated across the spit'n'polish deserted parade ground. Staff Clancy, his drill sergeant at Sandhurst, would have approved.

The officer nodded as his hand came up to reply in the Saint Cyr flourish. He recognized him. One of the best. Maybe *the* best. And an ex-Sandhurst man. Another five years would have seen him with a commission.

Further on, Sergeant Major Derudder, a Belgian of Flemish stock with seventeen years' service, stood outside the entrance to the Musée de la Légion Etrangere in his dress uniform, medals from Africa to the Gulf War glinting across his chest in the mellow sun of a Provençal afternoon. Sergeant Major De Rudder took a deep drag on his Gauloise and squinted at the Légionnaire coming towards him. *Johnny*, he said to himself with wry affection. *Our best*. A file clicked open in his head. Ex-Sandhurst, Lieutenant in the SAS, and in another two hours, ex-Légionnaire. Champion long-distance runner, crack shot, good bearing and exemplary turnout. Five-ten, 160 lbs of lean meat on the hoof, trained to kill pitilessly but with style – even his jeans and leather jacket were worn with class.

Sergeant Major De Rudder flicked his Gauloise into the sand-bowl, raised his face to the sky. The nostrils beneath his high-bridged Flemish nose quivered, his lips curled in a snarl. In perfect imitation of a high-spirited horse, he neighed, then stamped his left foot on the ground.

Johnny stopped in his tracks, gently put the rucksack on the ground, and smartly slapped his thigh. He, too, raised his face to the limpid Provençal sky and



neighed, then stamped his foot. It was the greeting of the First Squadron of the First Foreign Regiment of Cavalry, raised in 1635 ... the oldest surviving mercenary unit in the world.

The two men shook hands. Sergeant Major De Rudder was proud of Johnny's streamlined efficiency. Johnny was the epitome of a Légionnaire. Impeccable turnout, even in civvies, and combat perfect.

"*Alors*, Johnny, you going *civile*?"

"In a couple of hours, Chief."

Johnny's French was fluent, but with the cultural arrogance typical to most Englishmen in the Légion, he had retained the Anglo-Saxon hard consonants and stressed vowels throughout his five-year contract.

"You got a job – *du boulot*?"

The Légion is concerned for its own.

"Not yet, but *bientôt*."

"Hmm. You're a good Légionnaire. The doors will always be open to you."

Seventeen years in the Légion allowed De Rudder to say this without any hint of pomposity.

"*Oui chef* – that's what the General told me this morning at the *Liberation* ceremony – when he gave me my discharge papers and Certificate of Merit."

"You got your money from the Indian?"

The treasury officer, a captain, was Indian.

"No problem."

Johnny patted the leather belt holding up his jeans. It would have seemed a little plump to a close observer. Of fine leather, a zip ran along the back of its length. The Légion salary is as modest as its bonuses are generous. A wise Légionnaire spends his salary, saves

## BLOOD MONEY

his bonuses and is vigilant about carrying large amounts of cash. Denied a bank account, he has no option.

“And your name, Johnny?”

This was a bit of a joke. Every Englishman in the Légion is called ‘Johnny’, but Johnny was his real name.

“Still Johnny Kilvington.”

If De Rudder had been the sort of person to get embarrassed, he would have gone red. Instead, a blank mask dropped over his face. A Légionnaire signs up with the Foreign Légion for adventure, military professionalism and the guarantee of anonymity – *l’anonymat* – down to a meticulous change of identity and even nationality by the BPLE – *Bureau des Personnels de la Légion Etrangère*. With Johnny Kilvington it had taken four weeks, flitting him from Paris to Lille, to Marseilles and then to Aubagne. Once under *l’anonymat*, the Légionnaire’s real identity is secret. *L’anonymat* is so sacred a trust that every recruit is considered under a declared identity. After a certain length of service, he is asked if he wants to revert to his former identity, the process being called *rectification de l’état civile*. Either way, the Légionnaire’s choice is respected, as long as he understands one thing: at the end of his contract, his discharge papers will carry the *Identité Déclarée* stamp of the BSLE – *Bureau des Statistiques de la Légion Etrangère* – a smoke screen for the security apparatus of the Légion. The stamp ensures against any misuse of *l’anonymat*. The watertight protection of the identity change is only valid for the duration of the Légion

contract.

“You want to have a look around, Johnny?”

“Yes.”

They stepped into the austere marble elegance surrounding the Légion's sacred relics and icons. De Rudder's dress shoes echoed on the mirror-like marble, Johnny's Nikes managed to retain a lethal silence. The Légion Museum has the same effect on all visitors – there are too many ghosts, and after a minute's silence, you can feel them, even hear them. US submariners who regularly visit the museum when they dock in Marseilles have reported these feelings. After the Gulf War, General Schwarzkopf stood in the entrance hall with goose pimples breaking out over his beefy forearms. As museums go, it is in impeccable French taste, the lighting and arrangement done by highly skilled and talented professionals – all Légionnaires. It is the Légion's boast that it never needs to call in outsiders for specific skills – there are specialists of every kind who bring their skills to the ranks of the Légion.

Johnny and De Rudder held silent communion in front of the wall consecrated to portraits of the Légion tribe – each seamed face a piece of the Western myth that surrounds this force. The play of light and shadow chosen by De Rudder to highlight the ancestral gallery was appropriate to the nether world of the Légion. Deep inside him and far away, Johnny heard a falcon's cry above mists of yellow sand ... the gallop of desert steeds ... flash of cold steel ... pools of blood ... a burnoused figure charging in his direction became a black robed grim reaper with raised scythe ... startled,

## BLOOD MONEY

Johnny broke out of it. His armpits felt moist. De Rudder sensed his reverie; he'd seen it all too often. Once the Légion expertly demolished a recruit's past life, Légionnaires of the past became his new ancestors in a blood-bond.

"The crypt?" De Rudder inquired quietly.

Johnny nodded, and they entered the enormous black-marbled hall. The walls had no decoration, only the names of fallen Légionnaires. The weight of doom was heavy. The music came on automatically. It was suffocating, "dirge-like" as General Schwarzkopf described it in his memoirs. The Légion's eighty-three paces a minute was the traditional Hohenloe mercenary regiments' pace, much slower than the French army's one hundred and twenty steps.

The centerpiece of the crypt is a glass case with bits and pieces of old relics. The wooden hand of Captain Danjou stands out, paraded once a year on the 30th of April before massed ranks of Légionnaires overlooked by the monument to the dead. In Camerone, Mexico, in 1863, sixty-two NCOs and men led by Captain Danjou successfully diverted two thousand crack Mexican troops to save a French convoy. Cornered in an old hacienda, they fought to the last man. Before dying, Captain Danjou made them promise not to surrender. The foreign-born soldiers kept their contractual word, and the Mexican dispatches vindicate it. In 1892 a monument was raised on the spot. Camerone is the central myth of the Légion, as venerated as Marathon by the ancient Greeks.

Both men quietly retraced their steps to the mournful tempo of *Adieu Veille Europe*.

## AZAM GILL

In the hallway, Warrant Officer Pfeiffer grimaced. In his sixties, the weather-beaten German NCO was old enough to have served in the Wehrmacht. At fourteen, he was one of the fanatical teenagers resisting the allied advance in the Black Forest. Wounded but not captured, disillusioned but not bitter, his intellect guided him. After the war, two successful hold-ups in Belgium left him with a choice: a third hold-up, which might be successful, or Odessa, the Nazi organization smuggling fascists to safety. Neither would give him the legitimacy he knew was necessary to survive in the New World. He decided that serving in the Foreign Légion would be of mutual benefit to himself and France. He got a new country, France got a trooper. Over his decades of service, neither party had cause for regret.

*“Achtung Johnny!”*

Warrant Officer Pfeiffer’s standard greeting. The lupine smile reinforced rather than mitigated his natural authority and fearsome reputation. Medium height and build, legend hovered over his head like a halo.

*“Mes respects, mon adjudant.”* Johnny slapped his thigh with reflexive precision.

*“Boire un coup – one for der roat, ja?”*

Pfeiffer was an ageless father setting his son on the path of the wide wicked world.

*“Bien sûr, mon adjudant.”* Johnny was touched by the gesture.

Pfeiffer’s office would have done both a General and a General Motor’s manager credit. On one side stood a walnut desk, three telephones of different colors, and a Hewlett-Packard terminal. Behind this array hung an electronic wall display next to a monitoring screen.

## BLOOD MONEY

Sensors from the cutting edge of technology constantly monitored the temperature, state of humidity, electric circuits, voltage, even seismic tremors. The system was linked on an Aptor network. At the first hint of discrepancy, the electric lights blinked twice – a discreet alarm. The valuables on display alone were worth a few thousand million. In the secret vaults beneath the museum lies the Légion's collateral, as jealously guarded as the crown jewels of the House of Windsor. Its existence is not denied, but never acknowledged. It is alluded to in the most oblique references by the select lodge of veteran officers, NCOs and Légionnaires who administer it.

Unknown to Johnny, the chair he was sitting in was directly above the vault containing the original handwritten manuscript of *La Chanson de Roland*, predating the one in the Bodleyan by two decades. De Rudder sat opposite the oval table in the corner. The table was 19th century ebony with the Légion crest carved in its center, presented by a Druze chief during the Syrian campaign. From a cabinet Pfeiffer selected a bottle and three small glasses. The bottle contained a clear liquid and had no label. As Pfeiffer's gnarled old hands gently twisted the cork, he announced: "*Eau de vie de poire*, seventy percent, from Puylobier, matured for ten years."

De Rudder and Johnny inclined their heads in silent acknowledgement of the privilege as the aroma of William pears caressed the room. Puylobier is the retirement home for incapacitated Légionnaires: it is also a working farm with superb vineyards only a few kilometres from Aubagne.

Pfeiffer sat at the table. They clinked glasses, growled: "*tchin-tchin*," and took a sip each.

"You're going back to the British army?"

"Once is enough, *mon adjudant*," Johnny replied.

"And you've been with the best now," De Rudder added with a glint in his eyes.

"That's not quite true," Johnny asserted.

"Marseilles is a nice town. You can't get bored there. Lots to do, eh Johnny?"

"Yes. Plenty of crumpet, *mon adjudant*, and hustlers all over the place. Easy to lose your money."

"Johnny's gonna live in England. You got a nice little English girl waiting for you in the rain?"

They laughed at De Rudder's dig at English weather.

"I'll nip across the channel to see my family. But no. I'll probably settle in France."

"Where?" queried Pfeiffer.

"The Arab quarter in Marseille, where he can start pimping *les petites anglaises!*" chuckled De Rudder.

Johnny grinned. "Good idea. Sell nookie to the suckers and get your own for free!"

There was a general exchange of lewd nods. De Rudder and Pfeiffer were not surprised by Johnny's absence of decision. It reflected a drifter cowboy culture common to many Légionnaires.

"Seriously, somewhere with mountains around. Getting a little bored with this Mediterranean landscape. I'll have to think about it. Any ideas, *mon adjudant?*"

"You ever been to Grenoble?"

"Sure. Super town, surrounded by mountains. Rich.

## BLOOD MONEY

Calls itself Gateway to the Alps. Plenty of bars. Looks smart. Winter Olympics '68.”

Pfeiffer nodded.

“Yes, Gateway to the Alps. It’s a techno pole with the second-highest industrial turnover in France. Population around 400,000, and ...” here he raised his right index in the air. “... The old Légionnaires Association – *l’amicale* – of Grenoble, is the best-organized in France. Their meeting hall is in the officers’ mess of the Alpine Division. Old Légionnaires occupy key positions in industry and local government. You won’t be by yourself. If you’re ever there, say *bonjour* to Marinescu from me. He’s the president of *l’amicale*. Romanian.”

The last word was a friendly dismissal.

Johnny and De Rudder exchanged looks. De Rudder raised his glass.

“I wish you *merde*, Johnny,” he proposed. “Shit.”

“*Merde*,” echoed Pfeiffer, both NCOs wishing good luck in the French tradition set by General Cambron in his defiant response to the British at Waterloo.

They clinked glasses and tossed the remaining fiery liquid down their throats.

Pfeiffer and De Rudder escorted Johnny to the door. As with all practitioners of high-risk professions, the farewell itself was not a drawn-out affair. If anything, perhaps a little brusque. Brief, dry handshakes, the odd expletive, and Johnny was walking down the shady path that led up to the *fourrier’s*, rucksack over his left shoulder. *Fourrier* refers to the Quartermaster’s office, and at Aubagne, is where a recruit is kitted out with over fifty thousand francs worth of *paquetage*.



## AZAM GILL

Pfeiffer closed the door to his office. His eyes were neutral, professional. He picked up the phone and dialed a number. “Yes, that’s right. He’ll head for Grenoble.”

Twenty-five echoes of Johnny’s past came around a corner at a sharp clip, to the *ein-zwein* count in German by a Swiss-German corporal whose face had seen nineteen years but whose eyes had seen more. The twenty-five recruits represented every race and color, and the average age looked about thirty-five. Johnny wished them a silent *merde*. He wondered how many would make it through the living hell of Castelnaudary – Castel, to Légion hands – the training depot. Some would be medically discharged, others for being otherwise unsuitable, a few would desert, and the remaining would have earned the white képi of the most elegant mercenary in the world.

Johnny was back on the steps leading to the Allée Viennot, with the *monument aux morts* on his left, and the *fourrier’s* behind him. General Headquarters, Légion Command, from where the tentacles of the Légion’s General Staff reached out to control over ten thousand crack mercenaries on special forces’ duty, bristled with antennae. He breasted the top of the steps. Half-right was the building housing Légionnaires in transit, half-left the canteen, and opposite, the dreaded Statistical Department, to which Pfeiffer had made his brief call, and from where another call had been made to another number.

The buildings were typical of Sixties architecture

## BLOOD MONEY

with simple, straight, very modern lines. The equipment used inside the buildings was state of the art for France's crème-de-la-crème of the defense ministry.

Johnny turned left on the pavement, silently appreciating the meticulous flowerbeds. Légion regiments were immaculate and stylish. They never failed to remind him of Sandhurst, but that was many years ago.

The odd Légionnaire or NCO went past, some familiar, some unknown. He exchanged a few friendly insults with a couple of them, just overlooking the Képi Blanc building. The Képi Blanc is the Légion's monthly magazine, produced by Légionnaires under the supervision of a major. A slick production, as glossy as the gossipy Paris Match. The presses are high-tech, and maintained at high-cost. If they have other uses, it is not known.

He was walking down the slope now, deliberately keeping to the little path to avoid the cinema and *foyer* – the Légionnaires' canteen and bar. Too many mates to split a last beer with.

He rounded a corner and his heart quickened. The reality of *libération* hit him in the back of the knees. Even the keenest of observers, however, would have registered no change in his demeanor. He was twenty yards from the quarter-guard. Two tall, erectly lean MPs with brown faces walked past, escorting a bedraggled deserter who looked frightened. One of the MPs nodded to Johnny, and the other one winked. Johnny knew them well. Both were Punjabis – one a Muslim from the Pakistani half, the other a Sikh from the Indian half.

## AZAM GILL

Johnny walked up the steps to the quarter-guard veranda. The walls were decorated with trophies and insignias. The guard was a six-foot four Masai from Kenya. In his white képi, black chinstrap, crimson epaulettes, foragers, blue cummerbund, white belt and glistening black boots, the effect was pure pageantry. On his chest he wore the eagle of the alpine commando over a set of Para wings; next to it the crossed rifles of a sniper. His medals proclaimed his presence in the Gulf, Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Across his chest he held the business-like 5.56 caliber bull pup FAMAS with twenty rounds in the magazine and fixed bayonet. He exchanged winks with Johnny, and then Johnny found himself face to face with the guard commander, a craggy faced peasant from the dry hills of the Ardèche region. Johnny put his rucksack down. His last salute ... and it would be the best!

He stretched himself to full height, *stomach in chest out shoulders back chin tucked in neck-and-collar touching, and fuck you RSM Clancy of Sandhurst thisisit*, and his hands slapped his thighs with the whiplash of a gunshot and the palms opened outwards while the little fingers stayed glued to the seams. His eyes blazed into the sergeant's, his voice boomed from the pit of his stomach.

"Caporal-chef Kilvington.

"Five year's service, one year's rank.

"End of contract.

"At your orders SERGEANT!"

The last word was a stressed bark – growled the way England's Sandhurst and France's Castel preferred it.

## BLOOD MONEY

The sergeant snapped a salute in reply. Johnny handed over his discharge papers, then stood rigidly to attention as the sergeant handed them to a duty corporal through a window, a Vietnamese Johnny didn't know. The Vietnamese corporal duly noted the details in a register, handed them to the sergeant with a nasal "RAS – *rien à signaler*," which meant everything was in order. The sergeant handed back his papers, and Johnny slipped them into the inside pocket of his jacket. The sergeant came to attention.

"*Tu peux disposer!*" he growled.

"*Je peux disposer à vos ordres SERGEANT!*"

"*Bonne chance en civile.*"

"*Merci sergent.*"

A nod to the Masai on the way out, and then he stood at the crossroads outside, blinking in the Provençal sunlight, his heart beating a little faster than usual ... for the first time in years not very sure ... *the parting of the ways.*

### **MARSEILLES: *half an hour later.***

The train came to a halt, and the doors of the compartment hissed open. Johnny lithely jumped onto the platform of Marseilles station. It seemed strange being in the city without having to worry about the Légion MPs. The railway station was the same. An enormous bustle of travelers, bound for everywhere and from all over the world. Bra-less Scandinavian tourists with eager nipples thrusting against thin tee shirts, tight shorts and equally overstuffed rucksacks

carrying cartons of milk and fruit, eyes dripping Mediterranean waves. Young men who looked sexually satiated and young men who looked sex-starved. Businessmen clutching bags and briefcases, most of them in ill-cut off-the-rack suits. African women in their colorful head scarves moving with the majestic grace of their race, followed by their children and their men in sad Western clothes. North African immigrants coming back from holiday, carrying bags overloaded with souvenirs. North African immigrants going on holiday, carrying blue-striped plastic bags filled with bargain-basement gifts. Johnny could distinguish those going to North Africa from those coming back. The outgoers changed into their djellebahs, and the incomers flashed cheap chalk-striped casbah suits with open collars and kaffiyes.

He kept an eye out for sharp operators. Wide boys. Pickpockets. He wondered if he had already been 'sold'. A pickpocket would spot a likely mark and position the sidekick, usually a girl. She would be dressed to distract any man short of one undergoing treatment for impotency, in which case she could always bump into him. The distraction allowed the pickpocket, using whatever method his school in Colombia, Tunis, Corsica or Sardinia had trained him in, to relieve the mark's wallet. However, if the target presented no opportunity within the territory staked out by each pair of pickpockets, they would use sign language to sell the target to the next pickpocket. Later, the seller would receive a percentage from the buyer.

A faceful of smiling yellow buckteeth appeared in Johnny's vision.

## BLOOD MONEY

“Légionnaire?”

“No,” Johnny replied flatly.

The smile became crafty. The hustler understood in a flash that this was a freshly discharged Légionnaire, which meant cash on the hoof. A bared forearm with a tattoo proclaiming *Legio Patria Nostra* – the Légion is my fatherland – now inserted itself in Johnny’s vision. He knew what was coming, and also what would follow.

“I’m an ex-Légionnaire. Down and out. You gonna buy me a drink? Me and my girlfriend?”

Johnny sighed. It was a line he’d never fallen for. Never had anybody suckered him in, and they weren’t about to.

“Take a rain check.”

The yellow teeth fought to retain their display, but the eyes gave up. Viciousness lurked behind pupils rapidly assessing chances.

“*Putain*, come on,” he urged half-heartedly.

Without replying, Johnny turned and excused himself through a group of young American tourists talking in loud voices echoing under the fifty foot high vaulted ceiling of the station. Two trains whooshed past.

Unnoticed by Johnny, Yellow Teeth looked sideways towards a man in a smart blue blazer and tie. Blue Blazer gave an imperceptible nod. Yellow Teeth, unperceived by the single-minded human stream flowing past, turned discreetly towards the wall outside the public toilets. He put both hands over his face. When they came away, his cheeks were lean, and teeth perfectly straight and clean. He put the cheek pads, teeth covers and his tatty jacket in his shoulder

bag, and slipped on a pair of dark glasses. He chucked the shoulder bag into the nearest bin. Even his walk had changed. It had the natty spring of the well-heeled tourist. It had only taken six seconds. Yellow Teeth could make out the shape of Johnny's head thirty paces ahead of him. He started the tail.

Johnny stopped in front of the electronic screen displaying outgoing trains. There was one for Grenoble in a couple of hours. He glanced towards the self-service buffet, run by the ex-chief cookery instructor of the Légion. If he knew you or guessed you were a Légionnaire, you always got an extra dollop of something. He rejected the idea. Two hours in a railway buffet was too much for just an extra spoonful of couscous. He tried the newsstand. Bare buttocks and breasts photographed from odd angles danced in his vision.

What the hell, he thought. I've got time. I've got thirty-five thousand in the money-belt, two thousand in the wallet. Why not the real thing?

Johnny walked out of the station, refusing a taxi with a head movement. He stood on the steps overlooking the boulevard Athènes Dugommier. It was the same as usual. A little tacky, a little tough, the café tables set on the pavement; brave little islands holding fast against the human torrent. Johnny grinned to himself. This was Marseilles, a tough wide-open town. A Légionnaire's town. He saw the odd white képi bobbing on the human stream. His Nikes were soundless as he light-footedly descended the steps.

Yellow Teeth understood what Johnny was up to. This was going to be easier than expected. His pocket

## BLOOD MONEY

carried the tools of his trade. Knockout drops and a brass knuckle-duster covered with vulcanized rubber. He went past Blue Blazer who had positioned himself at the bottom of the steps. They exchanged glances. Blue Blazer was satisfied. Yellow Teeth was a seasoned operator. His code-name was *Pétard*, and he was a police sergeant of the DST – *Direction de Surveillance de la Territoire* – French Counterintelligence, counterpart of the FBI or MI5. He was on secondment for this operation.

*Pétard* saw Johnny turn right on the rue Cannébière – perfect, he thought. Another sucker headed for the *vieux port* area, famous since the film *The French Connection*. An area of raucous nightclubs, girlie bars, brothels, pimps and drug peddlers.

Johnny had always preferred the Cannébière to the Champs Elysées of Paris. On the Champs Elysées, he sensed the attraction France held for foreigners. On the Cannébière, he felt Marseilles' pulse. It was like being on stage right next to the snare drums of a rock band. Walking down the broad avenue always quickened his blood. Its cars chock-a-block were a kaleidoscope of energy. The multi-ethnic population hissed like a giant snake drying itself out after a fierce storm. And the girls – they were everywhere, and in all varieties. Enticing bottoms wiggling with energy – flash of bare arm, the curve of a breast, smiles, shopping bags, a hand pushing back an intrusive lock of hair. Impudent Arabs, sexy blacks, ultra-feminine ooh-la-la-French, bold Americans, overpowering Germans – here they were, women of different races. Their collective pants of excitement hung in the air. His nostrils flared slightly.



They walked in and out of the smart shops, crotches lightly brushing against bottoms, chic plastic bags sensuously rubbing long thighs.

The yacht club of Marseilles coned out in his vision. Colorful boats bobbed in the gay harbor against the backdrop of Fort Saint Nicholas – one of the Légion's recruiting depots. The harbor serving as the yacht club is about a hundred yards broad and two hundred long, lined with wooden docks. The two club bars were festooned with multi-colored pennants. It was almost dark. The fluttering pennants evoked a childhood pleasure. A road ran along both sides of the harbor. On his right, across the road that ran the length of the harbor, used to be the old *casbah* of Marseilles. A series of narrow alleys twisting their serpentine form in a neighborhood redolent with tales of freckle-faced English girls shanghaied in tailor shops. The Resistance had started making good use of this terrain during the Second World War, but the Germans had learnt their lesson fighting determined Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. With cold-blooded Teutonic efficiency, they had brought in tank-dozers and razed it to the ground. After the dust of the armistice had settled, a proud town council had reconstructed it. Although still a very charming *quartier*, the chic of Europe pervaded the sensuous exotica of the Mediterranean basin.

The road behind the docks is now lined with expensive, stylish bars. Above them, the flats have been bought up by families like the Ferieu's of Grenoble. They are used for nautical holidays. The streets behind these bars and flats overlooking the harbor are apparently quiet residential neighborhoods.

## BLOOD MONEY

Behind the quiet façade of these buildings are the headquarters of Marseilles' *Unione Corse* or *La Corsa* – the Corsican Mafia.

There is also the mercenaries' bar. Chez Hans. It is a watering hole and message drop for soldiers of fortune, the nucleus of which is ex-Légionnaires – Johnny's destination.

Lining the road behind the docks on the other side are seafood restaurants. Each restaurant rents the services of a smooth-talking character poised at its entrance who verbally pounces on the strolling tourist or holiday-maker and just stops short of physically dragging him into his restaurant for a plate of Marseilles oysters imported from Thailand. The streets behind these restaurants either contain the headquarters of organizations such as the *Honorata Socéta* – called the Italian Mafia by ill-informed journalists of dubious repute – or they lead to illustrious message drops such as Chez Hans. Indiscreet bars of doubtful morality called *bars américain* by the French and French bars by Americans, dominate these streets, several of which are as open and as inviting as the bars themselves.

A minute later, Johnny was at Chez Hans. He saw the sign, and suddenly realized how thirsty he actually was. A hundred yards to his rear, *Pétard* was struck by the same thought. A beer would go down very nicely indeed.

Chez Hans owes its name to its owner, Hans. His family name is known only to him, and after the end of the Second World War, he registered himself with the French authorities as a stateless person by virtue of having lost his memory. He gave his name as Hans, all

he could remember. The French clerk, with a typically Gallic sense of humor, gave him the family name of Dupont. Once the French authorities satisfied themselves that Hans was neither a war criminal nor even an ex-Wehrmacht soldier, he entered the French system of *Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité*. He was sent to a convalescent home, housed and fed, and given psychiatric treatment to help bring his memory back. He never fully recovered, and thus became eligible for a state pension. The pension confirmed, and once released from the convalescent home, Hans made a remarkable recovery. Except for his name, and what he had actually done during the war, his memory came flooding back. Two years he lived the frugal life of a monk, working in a carbolic soap factory – *le savon de marseilles* – in which the Foreign Légion is said to hold shares.

Hans did a lot of overtime, lived in a refugee hostel and took French language classes organized by the local social worker. Two years of Teutonic frugality, a small nest egg, and the social worker's recommendation allowed him to obtain a loan from the Credit Lyonnais bank. Everybody was willing to help a beaten down German refugee who felt guilty about German war crimes, and was so obviously himself a victim. Hans bought a ramshackle old bar in a street parallel to the road running along the right side of the yacht club – the Quai d'Honneur – it's present site. The bar's main entrance was the Rue du Soif – Thirsty Street – but it had a discreet door opening onto the little alley running behind it which would be good for business. Hans kept his job for another six months,

## BLOOD MONEY

working nights and weekends to do up the bar and make the little flat above it habitable. When it was finished, the social worker glowed with pride at his industriousness. She sent a report to Paris, which was duly published in the Social Security magazine, 'Avis', as an example of an immigrant's successful integration into French society.

Infact, Hans Dupont had been an agent for the Abwehr – German military intelligence. Unknown except to himself, he had been the shadowy agent who co-coordinated the Generals' plot against Hitler. Captured and castrated by the SS, he had escaped from a prison camp. Single-handedly, he had reinvented himself as Hans Dupont of the lost memory.

For a few months following the publication of the article in the Social Security magazine, part of Hans Dupont's mind still suffered from amnesia, but the rest of it appeared to function normally. His bar sprouted every German regimental insignia he could lay his hands on. Instead of getting firebombed by old Resistance die-hards, Chez Hans became the watering hole of old members of the *milice*, the pro-Nazi French militia. He was protected, and in return, took messages and passed them on. He was, in due time, contacted by members of Odessa. Hans drew the line at helping them.

By the mid-Fifties, France had committed itself deeply to the Indo-China war. Légion regiments bore the brunt of the fighting, their strength was made up mainly by Germans, most of whom were ex-Wehrmacht, and their embarkation point Marseilles port. Before boarding ship, they would drop in at Chez

Hans for a drink. Professional soldiers of the French regular army followed in their wake. Chez Hans became the message drop for the shadowy world of military toughs. When the troubles started in the Belgian Congo, Chez Hans was the logical place to have a drink, pick up a girl and leave a message. Marseilles yacht club was a transit point for many of the gunrunners. The end of the troubles in the Congo left many mercenaries unemployed, and the Cold War being fought by proxy all over Africa had Western governments scouring for soldiers of fortune. Chez Hans took off as the unofficial mercenaries' bureau, and had never looked back since.

Two decades of hard work transformed Chez Hans from a bar into an institution. Hans Dupont had recreated his world. He basked in it. In spite of his castration, it was commonly felt that he had balls.

He now stood behind the bar counter, an untouched beer in a stein before him. Above and behind him were insignias of the Légion, with two white képis. The other walls were liberally covered with German Army Second World War insignias, trophies, flags and crests. The furniture was wood and leather. An overpoweringly masculine atmosphere that would have raised any decent woman's hackles.

The three suggestively dressed girls at the bar felt at home. In the dim lights, their dyed blonde hair looked almost natural, and their excessive makeup was appropriate. Hans did not run a girlie bar, but certain girls who fitted into the sub-culture, were discreet and clean, were allowed there. Hans' face was leathery, creased but ageless. Hard to tell his age, but he had

## BLOOD MONEY

seen fifty or sixty not long ago. Actually, he was a little older, but his sparse eating habits supported a natural leanness. Hans moved his head slowly to Edith Piaf's *Non, Je ne regrette rien*, which enveloped the bar. Too early for customers, he thought.

The door opened and Johnny smoothly glided across the varnished French parquet, put his rucksack below the counter.

"*Salute English!*" Hans greeted Johnny in a mixture of French and German. He only knew Johnny by face. His flawless memory allowed him to retain the image of every face that passed through his bar. The same immaculate attention to detail had made him indispensable to the Abwehr. His discretion, moreover, was absolute. If a name wasn't offered, he never asked for it. Thus was Chez Hans known to mercenaries from Africa to Colorado to Scandinavia to the Middle East.

"*Salut Hans! Ça va?*"

They shook hands.

"What'll it be?"

"Two steins of German tap-lager."

"*Danks* you."

A ritual at Chez Hans. He rarely drank with a patron, and that explained the beer in front of him, which would last until closing time. But you bought Hans one beer, which he didn't drink. Then he bought you a beer, which you did drink. Such were Hans' little rituals, and if you were a part of the brotherhood, you respected them, which is why Johnny, a whiskey drinker, did the right thing and ordered a beer.

One of the girls, svelte in a crimson satin dress that just stopped short of being topless, sidled up to him.

“And one for me?”

“*Une autre bière, Hans, s’il te plait.*”

“*Ja.*”

The door opened and *Pétard* entered. He looked vaguely familiar to Johnny, and something niggled in his memory, but he was unable to place it. He dismissed it, and turned his attention to the girl’s breasts.

“I’m Sylvie. Are you English?”

“Yes.”

“Ah!” she laughed, and her dark-brown eyes suddenly lost the bargirl’s far away, dull expression. For a fleeting second, they were the eyes of a young girl who finds life exciting. “The Beatles – A Yellow Submarine!”

The other two girls echoed her enthusiasm.

“Yellow Submarine!” they chorused.

Hans put their beers on the bar, they clinked glasses and took the first swallows. It was crisp German lager, and it was good. There was a pause in the music.

The other two girls, one in a latex jump suit with obviously nothing underneath but skin, the other in a pair of jeans that could only have been painted on her magnificently sculpted legs, started singing slowly:

“We all live in a yellow submarine, a yellow ...”

Sylvie started humming, and *Pétard* joined in from Johnny’s right. Stuck between the two, Johnny had to sing along. *Pétard* raised his beer, and they clinked glasses. Their eyes locked for a fraction of a second. *Pétard* smiled. The niggle was back in Johnny’s brain, but it slipped away again, so he smiled back. Then they

## BLOOD MONEY

were all singing: "Yellow Submarine," a small band bravely trying to scour for something meaningful to fill their lives by filling a seedy bar with good cheer. Hans didn't join in, but his smile was one of approval. Behind his smile, the razor-sharp brain ticked rapidly, assessing options and discarding them.

He recognized *Pétard*, although *Pétard* didn't know it. Once, on somebody's confidential business in Tangiers as Hans sat in the dim corner of a belly-dancing joint, his contact had pointed him out, and explained his role in the nether world of intelligence.

Johnny ordered a round of beers, and Sylvie impulsively kissed him on the neck. Johnny's heart missed a beat. His crotch flared briefly.

"Are you on leave – back from Djibouti, maybe?" Sylvie wanted to know.

"No. Just finished my contract."

"I'm Jean-Jacques. I finished my contract with the Fusiliers Commando Marines last year."

Johnny smiled, and *Pétard* knew he had him. The Commando Marines are part of French Special Forces, in operational capability counterparts of the British Special Boat Squadron or the American Seals. "You guys break your berets to the right, like the British Army."

*Pétard* smiled with a thumbs-up. "You're right, goes back to the Second World War."

"I know, the Fusiliers worked with Lord Lovat's commandos."

"Or they worked with us!"

They exchanged friendly grimaces and Sylvie touched Johnny's arm.



“Like to dance?”

“In a minute, why not?”

The jukebox was silent, and Johnny understood. He handed Sylvie a ten-franc coin, then watched her bottom engage in desperate wiggles towards the jukebox. Johnny and *Pétard* exchanged suitably appreciative glances. The glasses were empty, and *Pétard* ordered another round. Sylvie was back, and the jukebox emitted the steady pulsation of a lecherous Brazilian lambada.

Raucous laughter entered through the open door. Two hulking Légionnaires of Scandinavian stock stood in the doorway, dwarfing a pretty dark-haired girl. Actually, one of the Légionnaires was Dutch, and the other American, and they were only dwarfing the dark-haired beauty because she was a dwarf. Stunning, she was more miniature than dwarf, with none of the characteristics of one – neither an elongated trunk nor reduced legs. She had curly black hair that reached down to her shoulders, full breasts, a pert bottom, and slim legs. Only ... her bottomless eyes ... a sad old woman's eyes ....

She was a transvestite who used to be a ‘mule’ for the *Unione Corse* money-laundering operation between Marseilles and the Seychelles. She also rented out her body to clients of unorthodox tastes. Eventually, she had invested in plastic surgery and became a ravishing beauty of small proportions. She now ran a brothel that catered only to rich men's perversions. In her spare time she was a Légion groupie, finding hunky Légionnaires she could initiate into her dark sexual practices.

## BLOOD MONEY

She looked at Johnny with a smile of recognition. He nodded and smiled in return, holding onto his distaste. Dorothee always made him feel sad, and for some reason, a little embarrassed to be a man. Dorothee sensed it in some men, and the gloating rose up in her. Her eyes caressed her two Légionnaires. Their anticipation of an evening's debauchery left them impervious to their surroundings.

*Pétard* sensed the breach in Johnny, and expertly maneuvered himself into it.

"The place seems to be getting crowded," he fatuously remarked, his eyes alertly focusing on Johnny's slightest reaction.

"You're right, let's split."

Hans gravely handed them their change. He respected everybody, remaining neutral. Just then the lambada tune was replaced by the even more lascivious African zouk. The Dutch Légionnaire made a few pelvic movements. Dorothee rose to the occasion. Her head came up to Johann's crotch, but the obvious implications of the configuration held no excitement for Johnny or *Pétard*. Danny, the American, guffawed, then put both hands around Dorothee's waist and raised her up. Her elegant black frock billowed a little, and it was obvious she had no underwear. Johnny's reaction to a bare crotch did not go unnoticed by *Pétard*.

"No lack of crumpet in Marseilles," he murmured to Johnny as soon as they were out. "What about the Kit Kat?"

"It's a good night-club, full of Légionnaires and wide boys. I like it. But I've got a train to catch in an hour." Johnny glanced at his Rolex Explorer.

“So have I. What about a quickie in the Arab quarter?”

“I think you’ve got the right idea.”

They turned back onto the Cannébière in the direction of the railway station. The Arab quarter then falls on the left, running parallel with the posh Cannébière. On the corner, at the entrance to the little alley leading to the brothels, Blue Blazer noted the air of bonhomie between Johnny and *Pétard*. Yes, *Pétard* was decidedly the best for this part of the operation. Blue Blazer discreetly said a few words for the transmitter mike in the button of his jacket. The next part of the operation was confirmed.

The alley Johnny and *Pétard* turned into was quiet, a little littered and smelly, but certainly not what one might expect from Marseilles’ toughest quarter. Then they turned right into a blaze of lights and a crowded, squalid alley where the teeming mass of males had the naked look of men deprived of a normal sex life. Women sat in the doorways and leaned on the balconies. Strains of North African and Western pop music faintly brushed air that held the subtle aroma of stale urine, semen, cheap perfume, strong smelling armpits and male lust – for sex and money. The pimps, a mixture of white, North African Arabs and Afros, had the fish-eyed look of sex merchants across the globe – the only species Johnny enjoyed beating up. Two huge Afros monopolized a street corner, looking threateningly enormous in their robes of emphatic colors. Their natural grace exuded the arrogant indolence of savage felines. They were drug peddlers, a species Johnny could have knee-capped with good

## BLOOD MONEY

cheer.

“Mind your Rolex, Johnny,” *Pétard* remarked.

Johnny’s eyes darkened behind the bright blue pupils. Danger lurked.

“That watch is more than a watch ...” The unspoken threat stood suspended in the space between the two men.

*Pétard* slid his index across his throat. Johnny nodded, then winked.

“You’ve got the right idea.”

What had appeared between the two men went on its way. They made way for a police van of the *brigade criminelle*, rolling slowly along the squalid street, the policemen’s flat eyes scanning the people, unable to hear the odd insulting hiss of *les flics*.

A low whistle sounded above their heads. Johnny looked up, saw a beautiful black face, flash of white teeth, merry eyes. His crotch tightened. Before he could turn into the doorway blocked by the unmoving shadow of the ubiquitous pimp, *Pétard* whispered.

“Further on. I know of a nice little house. A little expensive, but not a rip-off. The girls are pretty, clean, and you get a room.”

“Let’s go there,” agreed Johnny, nostrils flaring.

The body language was not lost on *Pétard*. The primitive male sex urge prevails over and directs the other senses, and distorts the perspective of the best fighting men, however well honed their discipline.

“That’s the wrong way, you’ll regret it,” sang the black prostitute from her balcony.

A Turk with a gold tooth and dashing moustache looked up, noticed the girl, and turned towards the

doorway.

Johnny looked up again and exchanged winks with the girl. Then they were in a side street and it stank – the stench from two overflowing bins was powerful, and the alley was dimly lit. There were doorways and windows but they were all dark. A sense of foreboding lurked in the squalidness. The silence tolled a bell in Johnny's head, but the crotch dismissed it. They went past the first bin. There was a scurrying sound. His brain screamed a warning and then he plunged headfirst into a black void.

A voice whispered a terse command into the buttonhole mike. An expert pair of hands removed Johnny's money-belt and Rolex. A car started up in the next alley. A pair of footsteps cat-footed away from Johnny's prone body. Next to his nostrils was a putrefying packet of frozen fish cakes. A rat scurried over his oblivious body. Soon there would be others.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ***The French Indian Ocean island of Guadeloupe, five years earlier.***

Nathalie Le Viallon sat at a corner table of Le Peroquet. The *patronne*, Ghislaine, of royal Malagasy descent, had made her nine-table restaurant famous throughout the Francophone countries. Le Peroquet attracted rich and famous from all over the world for its salads, fricassees and bavaois made from exotic fruits. The sensual elegance of the aloof Ghislaine was no doubt a factor, but there are things one does not mention lightly.

The light yellow summer frock set off Ghislaine's café au lait skin to perfection as she stood in the soft light behind the bar counter, nursing a *punch des isles*. She observed Nathalie with interest. Short, about five feet two or three, with a perfectly proportioned figure. A little taller, and she could have been the top Paris model Ghislaine used to be. The cat-green eyes, alpine-freckled nose and wide forehead over a heart-shaped chin were framed in a halo of dark-blond hair. The jade necklace around her throat, bared for kissing, was perfectly chosen to go with her eyes and the

discreet floral green Givenchy dress. Actually, Ghislaine had just made a mistake but did not realize it. On a schoolteacher's salary, Nathalie wouldn't have even been allowed into Givenchy's. The dress was a perfect copy sold by the department store, Galeries Lafayette. The jade necklace was real, though. A wedding present from Jean-Jacques' mother. The thought of Jean-Jacques caused an inward shudder. Two years living together in halls at Grenoble University was great fun. There was a university restaurant, a social life at subsidized rates that swirled around sports clubs. Skiing, windsurfing and sex were the big things. And she and Jean-Jacques found magic between them. She adored his lean-muscled body, and their frenzied love-making eventually evolved into long hours of lazy sex in their university room, in ski chalets or the woods bordering lake Laffrey where Napoleon had made his comeback before being trounced at Waterloo.

Then studies were suddenly over, they took their competitive civil service exams to be teachers, and then it was a whirl of bratty adolescents and papers to mark and shopping to do and housekeeping and cooking. Everything collapsed except for the sex, and then even that limped out. At the end of two years they found themselves with nothing except their familiar bodies to yawn at. They were adult, young and without children. Divorce would be bitter, expensive and long drawn out. Separation was the logical conclusion. That had come three weeks ago at the end of June and the school year. A check from her father allowed Nathalie to take this holiday.

## BLOOD MONEY

A Resistance leader in the Vercors region of Grenoble, and close associate of Jean Moulin who was tortured and killed by the Gestapo officer Klaus Barbie, Nathalie's father had run a little known cell called Groupe Roland. Groupe Roland consisted of five members trained in Scotland by Lord Lovat's commandos on his personal estate. In 1944 they became an extension of the British SAS. Their mission was to supply intelligence on German intentions. Gérard, her father, and the other four had lived on their nerves and never been caught. All five were hardy peasants of the Vercors plateau, now a national park. Three had died, one was in a retirement home waiting for cancer to take its due. Gérard stubbornly retained his twenty-five hectare farm and, with his war pension, was mildly affluent. Yet the war was like yesterday, and he had lived it to the full. He had seen people under extreme stress, and to see his daughter in that state saddened his heart. The check for this holiday was only temporary respite. He fretted over her emotional future, which could destroy her more surely than any financial difficulties.

Ghislaine took a sip of her punch, then changed the disc in the stereo. The lilting melody of the islands made her hips sway. There were not many patrons this Monday night. A group of four – two elegant couples, one Indian, the other black. She knew them. The Indian was a jeweler, the black a plantation manager. Their conversation was muted, with occasional trills of feminine laughter and masculine chuckles. In the muted lighting, wicker furniture, bamboo bar, marble tiles and island prints by local artists covering the



stucco walls, Ghislaine was at home.

She noticed the spitting image of Robert Redford sitting in the other corner. Seeing the Redford look-alike and Nathalie sitting by themselves on a balmy evening in her restaurant, mildly flirting with their eyes in half-hearted attempts sucked a void in the pit of her stomach. Blair was once again on one of his trips. Well, he had to follow his career, although they could both manage an hotel and then be together. But she understood his need. Blair was Afro-American, an ex-civil rights worker of the Sixties, child of black South Carolina farm laborers. His law degree had not led him into the back rooms of political wheeling-dealing, but the striped-suit tribe of the World Bank. He asked for, and was given the responsibility of co-ordinating loans for Black Africa. The hopelessness of the task had been tearing at his innards until he met Ghislaine in Paris. And then their lives filled with magic – when they could be together.

Ghislaine knew the Redford look-alike. He was one of those French traveling businessmen for whom being God's own gift to women is a tenet of faith. He always dressed as though he was playing 'white man in the tropics.' Tonight, too, he was in bush shirt and tropical trousers, right out of a scene in the film, *Out of Africa*. She had seen him two or three times over the past two years or so, each time accompanied by a different woman – black, brown, white – but always beautiful, and always the sort who exuded a natural air of availability. This evening he was alone, but maybe not for long. He *had* glanced at his watch a couple of times. Probably an appointment later. She suddenly caught

## BLOOD MONEY

his blue eyes in her gaze. He was very attractive, and if it hadn't been for Blair ...

*"Monsieur?"*

She was at his table and flashed him the smile that had projected her to the cover of Paris Match.

Redford almost simpered.

*"No dessert, but coffee and a cognac, please."*

*"Tout de suite, monsieur."* And as she walked away, Redford appreciated the high-slung jut of her inviting buttocks. He looked across the room, then flushed. The stunning little blonde who looked lonely and proud had caught his eyes caressing Ghislaine's walk. Her face held an amused smile.

*Honestly, men!* Nathalie thought. They spend their lives being adolescents with a sexual problem. Jean-Jacques was no different, but at least for most of their time together it had been *her* pert bottom that had made him salivate. She hadn't had sex for several weeks, and this was just before her period, when she felt horny. The man was interesting – blue eyes, rugged looks, lean hunky muscles she would enjoy stroking – then she dismissed the idea. Physically, yes, but emotionally she wasn't yet ready for a man. Another couple of days, and she would use her father's money to hire the efficiency of a male prostitute. Why should women be denied the release men had been enjoying since the dawn of history to create the world's oldest profession? She thought it was a good idea. On that thought she decided to order dessert.

Ghislaine approved of the woman's choice of dessert – a mango bavarois. So did the waiter, a snow headed Creole called Emile.

The two couples were thoroughly enjoying themselves, and wouldn't budge for another hour. Redford settled his bill, then glanced at his watch. The gesture wasn't lost on the two women. If Emile, the waiter, hadn't been in the kitchen, he too, would have picked it up. Ghislaine just knew Redford didn't have a date. The way he looked at his watch, it was business. But at eleven at night, she wondered; what business?

Nathalie's intellect told her it wasn't a woman, but the little voice in her heart whispered – *what if?* She dismissed the thought. She finished the last of the bavaois, stopping herself from smacking her lips like she did in her parents' farmhouse after one of her mother's fruit tarts.

Redford finished his cigarette, stubbed it out with deliberation, and with the accent of a cultured Parisian, wished everybody a good night. His eyes held Nathalie's for a fraction longer than was necessary. Then he walked out.

Nathalie signaled for her bill. Emile brought it on a carved ebony platter, and presented it with a dignified flourish appreciated by Nathalie. She reached into the pocket of her embroidered vest for her man's wallet – years ago, she had given up carrying a handbag. She left him a generous tip. Emile held the door with a feeling of compassion for her loneliness. Ghislaine's reply to Nathalie's *au revoir* floated out into the well-lit night over the cobblestoned road. The odd restaurant or bar that was still open radiated good cheer. The palm-trees were magnificent, the façades of the shops up-market, and the single-story structures with sloping roofs out of a picture-postcard.

## BLOOD MONEY

In the street outside, Nathalie was a little at a loss. Emile hadn't quite shut the door, and discreetly peeped his snowy head out.

"Would *madame* prefer a taxi, perhaps?"

"No thanks. I'm at the Hotel Magnifique. It's not far – but it *is* safe, isn't it?"

"On our islands, there is little crime, and we are a placid people. Enjoy your walk, *madame*."

"Thank you, and good night once again!"

"*À votre service, madame*," Emile replied with a Gallic flourish of his silverfoam head, matched by a flash of white teeth.

Nathalie turned left, her stiletto heels echoing sharply on the worn cobblestones. The street lamps of French colonial design threw pools of light her body effortlessly waded through. The fresh night air revived the half-bottle of Côte de Provence that had accompanied her generic sense of gastronomy. Her mind was a blank, she drifted past a bar that emitted the earthy beat of a zouk dance and she could see bodies gyrating in a frenzy of forgetfulness.

Someone whistled at her, but she ignored the invitation. A street led to her left, and the scent of magnolia, jasmine and hibiscus drifted to her nostrils. To put off facing the infinite emptiness of an hotel room, she turned down the road. A row of houses with well-kept gardens behind steel grills. The faint sound of voices, the aroma of marinated meat cooking over a charcoal brazier ... she turned again, walked on, then suddenly realized she was lost.

Controlled her panic, thought hard, took another side alley. This one was dark, no streetlights. She

heard the grunt of wild boars – a sound she was used to from her childhood – grunting – a savage panting – and her father’s hunting trips and what she had learnt from the old warrior subsumed her university education.

She took off her shoes and held them with the stiletto heels towards the onrush of wild boar. A shadow loomed in her vision, too high for a boar but she reacted without thinking and lashed out and upwards in a crude uppercut. The heel struck and then lodged itself.

The attacker gave a half-scream as the heel embedded itself under the left lower mandible. As the ghoulis Gestapo dentists had taught torturers, the insertion of steel in the gums releases unbearable pain and complete panic in the victim’s faculties. There was no blood, but that would course unencumbered when the shoe was pulled out. He rushed past her in a panic, convinced he was running to his death.

The second attacker panted in her adrenaline base. Dull steel glinted off a knife. He swore in Creole. Nathalie’s heart thumped loudly, he swore sibilantly, she stumbled. He shifted position and involuntarily her left hand came up from her side in a half-circle and the stiletto heel hit him in the crotch, just between the testicles and scrotum. His mouth opened in silent protest, brain paralyzed by pain. The knife clattered on the cobblestones. She knew she should hit him again. Her brain was on a roller coaster but reactionary thought had also secreted inaction and she stood there trembling while her brain said ‘*embed the heel in his temple*’ but the body just convulsed. Another attacker filled the night behind the one clutching his crotch with

## BLOOD MONEY

a soundless grimace of agony and then he keeled over in the fetus position, his head striking the cobblestones with a dull snap. He had been efficiently felled with a single blow to the kidneys delivered by an expert using the first two knuckles of his index and middle finger steadied by the tip of the thumb.

Nathalie gave a sharp gasp as she made out Redford's features in the dark – the third attacker! He dragged the Creole to one side and took her by the shoulders. Her trembling increased. The shoe dropped from her hand and he kicked it away. He shook her gently, then whispered soothing words in French, stroked her shoulders and then she was back.

"Who are you – what's going on?" she whispered harshly.

He made a snap decision and, if it went wrong, would bear responsibility for it.

"*Service Français*," he said rapidly, using the common reference for French intelligence. "I need your help."

She shook her head.

"Look, *ma puce*, we just saved each other's lives. Don't waste time. There might be others."

"Which service? My father was in the Resistance," she added.

A shadow dropped over his face.

"Later – trust me, or I'm off!"

"Okay."

He started walking her back the way she had come.

"Good. Which hotel are you at?"

"The Magnifique."

They walked out of the alley. Lights hit them full on,

paralyzing them in mid-step. A car engine revved behind the lights. Yellow lights winked from the roof of the car. A heavy dark face with expressionless eyes and a professional smile leaned out.

*“Taxi, monsieur dame?”*

Redford relaxed slightly and Nathalie breathed again. He took her hand and slid into the comfort of a Renault Safrane.

*“L’Hotel Magnifique, s’il vous plait.”*

The taxi driver expertly gunned the engine and his murmured reply was swallowed up by the sound of the engine. They were sailing in fourth on the road that ran along the oceanfront.

“Had a nice evening?”

“Yes, thank you,” Nathalie replied almost primly.

A lot of her composure was back, but the knees felt weak.

Her mind was still in turmoil. She had never been that violent. Once, at Grenoble University, one of the thirty-six Russian students who came every year on an exchange program, had tried his hand at date rape. She had bitten his arm and fled out of his room into Jean-Jacques’ arms. The Tartar had come running out of his room in pursuit, straight into Jean-Jacques’s fist. In fact, that had brought them together.

“Lovely night,” Redford remarked with ease.

“Fabulous,” she answered with a resentful glare, and he realized that behind her composure she was in shock. Might have a fit of hysterics once they were by themselves.

## BLOOD MONEY

The taxi hissed smoothly over the long drive lined with palms and manicured lawns bordered with exotic flora and fauna. The Magnifique was a four-star hotel, and the architecture was that of a colonial mansion with a porch supported by fluted columns. A liveried flunky hopped to open the door. Redford helped Nathalie out, paid and tipped the driver, then tipped the flunky who was overjoyed to get so generous a bonus so late in the night. 'A *real gentleman*,' he said to himself, already thinking of the horse he could lay the money on.

The airy hall, tiled in black and white marble with potted plants and rattan furniture under lazy fans and batik lampshades, was deserted except for the earnest young Creole with thick-lensed glasses, his head bent below the reception desk. He was a graduate student on a night job, which allowed him to write his dissertation on multi-ethnic societies. He looked up, and saw a barefoot woman with a man. He hid his surprise well – *carousing tourists, whatever will they get up to next* – and then the romantic in every Creole took over and as he handed Nathalie the key. He silently wished them a successful bedding.

Nathalie flushed, suddenly conscious of her bare feet. The taxi driver had either not noticed or not cared, and she had been in a daze. Her room was on the first floor – spacious, with a Jacuzzi-fitted bathroom and a small dressing room. A balcony allowed her a fine view of the ocean and foam-kissed beach.

She shut the door and stood squarely in front of Redford. Oddly, he found the tiny figure intimidating. Her green eyes flashed, and heaving breasts demanded attention.



“Now I want to know what the hell you’ve involved me in,” she said determinedly.

“You’re shaking. Sit down, have a drink and let me make a phone call.”

“I am not trembling!” she said in a voice shaking with rage. “*Putain*,” she cursed, “I am.”

He went to the little fridge concealed in the wardrobe, selected a half-bottle of Moët et Chandon while she sat in one of the comfortable armchairs. He opened the bottle with a sharp pop, and she nearly jumped. Without spilling a drop, he expertly poured her a glass, handed it to her in silence, then dialed a number.

“Claptrap,” he said in American accented English.

“Beartrap,” said the woman’s voice at the other end in American-accented English.

“Got the merchandise, but it was messy.”

“Bodies?”

“Maybe one – and a pair of women’s high heels to be recovered and destroyed.”

The voice at the other end took the information as a matter of routine. She put Redford on hold, and on another line passed a flurry of precise instructions in fluent French, then got back to him.

“A clean-up squad’s been activated. I want a report on the high heels.”

Briefly and succinctly, Redford reported to his controller.

He then answered a series of penetrating questions, ending with Nathalie’s room number. Nathalie sat sipping her Champagne and took all this in with slow surprise. He *did* sound like an intelligence agent. Like

## BLOOD MONEY

characters out of one of her father's Resistance stories. He answered another question on her room number, then was put on hold again.

"Champagne?" Her eyes mocked him, almost flirtatious, he was pleased to note.

"No thanks."

"Are you American?"

"Yes."

"You lied." Her eyes flashed. "You said you worked for the *Services Français*."

"I didn't lie," he said gently.

"Oh I see. We're OSS 117 Prince Malko, are we? And I'm expected to swallow that. Maybe you're just a hustler."

His smile was still gentle, and the eyes were soft.

"In a second – I'm on hold from my boss. After the call's over, I'll explain everything, *chérie*."

"I'm not your *chérie*, and don't ever pull that macho line ..."

"I'm sorry," he said, almost contritely. He *had* pushed it a little.

A voice squeaked and he put the phone to his ear.

"She checks out okay on the Hamburg computer. No record. No suspicious associations. The French records show her as Nathalie Le Viallon, twenty-five, separated six weeks ago. Both of them schoolteachers. One sister, schoolteacher, married to a dentist with two children. Father farmer, and led the most effective and secure intelligence-gathering operation of the Resistance. Both parents alive with security clearance. Nathalie studied literature at Grenoble University. Good student. Stubborn character common to the Vercors

peasantry. Brown belt in tae kwon do. Show her your DGSE ID, read her the official secrets act, stir her patriotism and recruit her as a courier. Clear?”

“Yes.”

“And she is not cleared to know the existence of the Schengen Group.”

The phone disconnected at the other end.

Nathalie was intrigued, but patient, and the Champagne *had* helped her relax.

Redford reached into the inner pocket of his bush-shirt and extracted a slim wallet. He opened it before Nathalie. She read the card, then giggled.

“DGSE – that’s *Direction Générale de Surveillance Extérieure* – French MI6 or CIA – and your name is Redford and your place of birth is Connecticut ...” Her voice trailed off as she read out the details of the plastic-encased card.

“What d’you want first – what happened tonight, or my life story?”

“What happened tonight.”

He poured some more Champagne, and lit a cigarette. Nathalie’s mouth tightened and she pointedly opened the windows onto the balcony. Redford smiled and took a deep drag.

“I had a rendezvous with an informant. He’s a senior intelligence officer in Trinidad Tobago, and a liaison officer with Libyan intelligence. He had information to pass on to me, which he did. Seconds after he left, I was ambushed by that pair of charming Creoles. They held a knife to my jugular and wanted the delivery handed over to them. Just then a diversionary action distracted them. Like ...”

## BLOOD MONEY

“Yeah, like me! So *I* saved *your* life, Robert Redford!”

She looked smug.

“Call me Peter.”

They smiled at each other.

“But what do Libya and Trinidad have to do with France?”

He sighed inwardly with the disappointment of every intelligence officer since the time operations became necessary. What the public is told is not what *is*. And in this time and age the pursuit of happiness was so time-consuming it further justified the public’s state of blissful ignorance, allowing them to cheerfully ignore what went into creating conditions to support their naiveté.

“France is home to ... what ... more than three million Muslims? There must be around eight million in Western Europe. Even if events in the Islamic world don’t affect their day to day living in Western Europe, it still influences their thinking.”

“Yes, we all realize that. But why?”

“Because that’s the way they see Islam. It’s more important than the nation-state they live in. Bit of nostalgia as well – keeping in touch sort of thing.”

“With what? A country they’ve never seen!”

“That’s it. The fellows who put gas-bottle bombs all over France last year – we all know that some were acting in sympathy and not under direct orders of the Algerian Islamists.”

She nodded hard. The girl was good material. A bit of time and she would put it all together. She was sitting, as attentive as if she’d booked a seat in a lecture hall.

“Islam’s also a platform for self-expression. So, as I was saying, because of this population of eight million or whatever, and not just because of oil imports, we have to watch events all over the world. In the Pacific Ocean, money and training from Islamic countries created a security threat in New Caledonia in 1988, and our hostage rescue operation came under fire from a press campaign lubricated by petro-dollars circulating through various front organizations. Insidiously, the Islamic world is moving into the media – by placing its own people when it can, but more dangerously, buying up our journalists.”

He blew a long stream of smoke. She scowled attractively.

“You talk like you’ve rehearsed. Have you practiced this, or do you mean it? I don’t know whether to play bored dumb or just plain fascinated ... let’s go fascinated. I mean; if they attain what you say is their objective, that could be really dangerous.”

“Right on! In Malaysia, Muslims are a minority, but they want to impose Shariat law by constitutional means on the majority of Christians, Taoists and Confucianists ...”

“You’re doing it again, Prof. What’s Shariat law?”

“It’s Islamic law compiled more than a thousand years ago.”

“You mean lopping off hands and feet and heads and no bank interest – like in Saudi Arabia! Wanting to stone that lady to death in Nigeria because she was pregnant with her husband’s baby and they were divorced?”

She looked horrified. He nodded wisely.

## BLOOD MONEY

“And Iran, and Pakistan and Sudan and the Gulf states. So when the Muslims in Malaysia demand Shariat law for their majority of non-Muslims, it’s liable to give ideas to their communities elsewhere – Nigeria, for instance.”

Nathalie looked a little skeptical. She uncrossed her legs, then crossed them again. The effect was not lost on Redford.

“You don’t really think the Muslims in France would ask for Shariat law? That’s getting a little paranoid!”

“In Britain, in 1992, the Muslim demand for a separate parliament was made shortly after the Shariat demand in Malaysia in 1990. And it’s been getting more strident every year. So there’s this Muslim minority community that willingly immigrated to a culture that had evolved a parliamentary democracy that allowed them to immigrate. Now they think there’s something wrong with that rule of law. They wanted to replace English common law and parliament with a thousand year old Middle Eastern judicial system. Asking for a separate parliament is a polite way of seceding.”

She shifted slightly, pushing her nipples ever so subtly against the fine fabric of her dress, eyes darting at his crotch. It was becoming hard to concentrate ... hard for both of them. He expressed his appreciation by raising his left eyebrow by a fraction.

“I remember watching it on TV, but it didn’t seem as serious as you’re making it out to be. I suppose you’re right – you don’t normally think about these things. And you say stuff like you’re going to write it down for a book of quotations. Breather?”

They sipped a little more of their Champagne in

silence until Peter stubbed his cigarette out like a tea-break-over signal. She was relieved but tried not to show it.

“So what about Trinidad?”

“Trinidad has a Catholic majority. The police chief was Muslim. Just after the Gulf War, he staged a coup d'état to protest against Saddam Hussein's defeat – remember that?”

“What's Trinidad got to do with Iraq?”

She couldn't scent the nicotine on his breath and wondered what toothpaste he used. *Signal?* She felt like giggling, but didn't. She'd sipped enough Champagne to feel like cozy midnight, but he was still talking like News At Nine.

“Good question, but that's how most Muslim people identify with each other. And of course this police chief had Libyan help, but we had no proof that would stand up in court. The file was put on hold until the results of the investigations into the 1988 Lockerbie bombing produced results a judge would accept. We felt encouraged, and reopened the Trinidad file. In the world of intelligence operations and informants, we discreetly put the word out that we were buyers of any information to strengthen the Lockerbie bombing case. Then we were lucky. A Trinidadian intelligence officer with a grudge and a need for money put out a feeler. At initial contact he gave us a verbal description, and we gave him half the agreed payment.”

“How much?”

“I don't know.”

The denial was professionally delivered, the eyes nonchalant.

## BLOOD MONEY

“The other half was supposed to be delivered tonight in exchange for the microfilm of documents proving that Libyan intelligence had organized the abortive coup d’état as part of an overall, long-term Islamic strategy to regain the leadership they lost when the Mongols destroyed Baghdad in the 13th century.

“I had a rendezvous with our Trinidadian informer. The rendezvous was successful. I passed him the money, and he slipped me a thimble-sized container designed for a physical insert.” He smiled challengingly at her.

“You’re telling me a lot. Too much. But enlighten me on one detail,” she sighed. “What the hell’s a ‘physical insert’?”

No laugh. Not even an ironic curl of the lip. He answered as though explaining the workings of a new digital watch. “A tube designed to be stuck up the ass.”

Although she had guessed it, actually hearing him say it made her chuckle.

“Just as I secured the insert, those two Creoles jumped me. They asked for the file at knifepoint, which meant that they didn’t realize it was in an insert. Then you came along, my little Lady of Orleans.”

“I saved your ass? Okay, that much is clear. But Libyan intelligence isn’t Islam.”

She raised the Champagne glass and caressed it with her lips before taking a sip. He thought it would be nice feeling those lips on his. He didn’t need the thought right now and thrust it aside.

“The Islamic world is made up of different elements. They’re divided into ideological camps, with theological schisms. However, they only disagree on the methods



of destabilizing the West, and not the objective itself. They see themselves deprived of their right to be the dominant global force. They interpret the rise of the West as a vulture that fed on the flesh of the declining Islamic empire. In actual fact, the Mongol invasion of 1258 destroyed the Caliphate in Baghdad, depopulating present-day Iraq and reducing their libraries to cinder. They prefer to ignore the effect of the renaissance on the rise of the West.”

“What the hell are you selling? Plain talk, please – you mean to say they dismiss Gibbs and Paul Kennedy?”

“Completely. And they seem to have convinced themselves that the possession of weapons leads to economic prosperity and social welfare. That explains the illogical desperation to possess weapons of mass destruction. The Islamic Conference of 1973 held in Pakistan came to a verbal agreement that Islamic pre-eminence in the world was subject to having a nuclear device.

“Nothing was written, but promises extracted, and courier-based lines of communication were established. Pakistan, under the enlightened Bhutto, would steal nuclear technology while petro-dollars financed the operation and terrorist attacks diverted their attention.”

He took another sip, fought down a belch. It didn't go unnoticed by Nathalie. She smiled to herself.

“And the Libyans and the Palestinians and the Sudanese – not to mention the Iranians – where do they come in?”

“And our allies the Saudis and the Gulf states. They pander to the Western need for oil – then play the rich

## BLOOD MONEY

man terrorized by bandits. Their argument for supporting all sorts of clandestine groups is that if they didn't, they would be overthrown and oil supply to the West would be at risk. We find ourselves in a position where we can't completely throttle the financial support given to terrorist organizations, and have to accept a certain number of attacks on our soil. So the openly radical Islamic governments serve to divert Western attention." He took a deep swallow. "And Pakistan makes the bomb."

"How did an international basket case like Pakistan manage it?"

"If you have the patience to listen ..." he replied, dangling the bait before her. He knew he had her, and there was a stirring of anticipation within his professional subconsciousness. The woman was genuinely interested. Intelligent, levelheaded and fearless, she could end up being an asset of the Schengen Group.

"The bottle's finished. I'll get another."

She bent to remove another bottle of Champagne. She was warming up. Having just severed her emotional ties, she was ripe for recruitment. An intellectual, she was genuinely interested in the subject. She turned around and her breasts were taut against the thin fabric of her dress. She could feel his eyes on her. The feeling wasn't entirely unpleasant.

She expertly twisted the cork, removed it silently, without spilling a drop, poured out the wine, and settled back in her chair. He admired her discreet expertise with the Champagne bottle. She was not vulgar. She would be exquisite in bed.

Her posture was indolent, yet alert. She appreciated his broad shoulders and muscled thighs with the detached regard of a connoisseur. The past-thirty-five thickness around his stomach was only erotic – love handles to the sexually mature French.

“Tell me about this Pakistani bomb – nuclear energy in a buffalo-cart economy with no political institutions.”

“It goes back to the Islamic Conference of 1973. Pakistan’s Prime Minister, a guy called Ali Bhutto – remember him? – started a super-secret operation.

“It was called Operation Zulfikar – the Sword of Allah. The intelligence agencies of Pakistan were kept out of the operation. Because their normal cooperation with Western intelligence agencies was uninterrupted, there was no suspicion. Operation Zulfikar set up dummy companies in different parts of the world. Their company in Germany ordered a part from, say, Brazil, that wasn’t meant for a nuclear plant, but could be used for it. Then the subsidiary of the first company registered in, say, Luxembourg, sent the part to Pakistan. In this way, the Pakistanis collected nuclear spare parts, and started assembly in Pakistan. And for processes, they stole. Visiting scientists even took back samples of fissionable material from places such as Sweden.

“By the time Western intelligence agencies woke up and the Americans got rid of Bhutto and put their own man, General Haq, in place, the Soviets had blundered into Afghanistan. Deep down, General Haq, an American man, was also an Islamic man. Instead of stopping the nuclear program, he continued it more efficiently. He let out Pakistan as an Afghan guerrilla

## BLOOD MONEY

base, funneled arms and money for the Americans, provided training and advisors to the Afghans. A large part of this money coming from relief agencies and the anti-communist budget of Western governments was diverted to the Islamic world's nuclear program. They now have the bomb, and we have to make sure it stays where it is."

"Wow!" Her eyes were shining with intellectual interest. "Why don't I just read the damned book?"

"The reason, my little dove, is that there isn't one. Europe is home to over eight million Muslims. European governments would like peace and stability to endure. So we have research centers and think tanks but their publications are restricted to scholarly circles. Put out something like Satanic Verses and there's a death sentence on the writer's head."

"I suppose you're a member of one of these scholarly circles."

They exchanged friendly smiles.

"No, I'm an intelligence operative. My father was a diplomat who married a beauty queen of the Vercors ..."

"I'm from the Vercors."

"Yes. A Le Viallon, from Lans en Vercors. My mother is a Huet from Gresse en Vercors."

"You don't say! How d'you know about me?"

"Well," he began, and his face assumed a disarmingly boyish smile. "The phone call I made. My field controller checked up on you."

Her face was a mixture of puzzlement and indignation.

"Shades of George Orwell and Big Brother! Who are

you people?”

“We’re not Big Brother. Computers and modems make life simple. There’s nothing on you, you’re not a known criminal or spy. We have a direct link to the super computer maintained by the German police in Hamburg. Knowing your room number allows us access to your name, ID card number, and date of arrival. The rest is routine. We can trust you.”

“Yeah ... you’re right. And I could kick myself for it,” she said lamely, embarrassed at her ignorance and blushing like a schoolgirl discovered in a crush.

He came across the room and ruffled her hair. It was a warm and affectionate gesture. He raised her up and it seemed very natural, very normal to her to find herself in his arms. Safe and warm and dry. The top of her head reached only to his chest, and she nuzzled her face into his bush-shirt. His man smell was exciting and powerful. His hand cupped her bottom and she moved it slightly.

Then ... the phone squeaked and he was all business. The blue eyes were devoid of passion as he picked it up.

“Beartrap,” the voice said.

He gave the password, listened to a series of precise, terse instructions, then hung up and turned to Nathalie. His face was serious, eyes with no hint of apology.

Nathalie was flustered, yet the phone call and the change in Redford were vaguely exciting.

“We’ve got a problem, Nathalie, and we’re wondering if you could help.”

“You want me to be a spy.”

## BLOOD MONEY

“Not really. We just need your help.”

“You want me to seduce somebody?”

“Not yet.”

They smiled at each other, and Redford took another sip of the Champagne.

“Guadeloupe has three hit teams of Creoles led by the Sudanese and controlled by Egyptian fundamentalists of the Islamic Brotherhood. They know I have the documents. If they can't get the tube from me, they'll assassinate me.”

“Guadeloupe's French territory. If you know about them, why can't you arrest them and get an escort for yourself on a French Air Force plane?”

“Yes, James Bond would have done that. But, in the first place, the operation is ultra-secret and the local service doesn't know about it. Secondly, they don't even know about the existence of our organization. Thirdly, we want to follow the team leaders and hope to confirm a link between the Libyans and the Sudanese.”

“Where do I come in?”

She was clearly intrigued, and he knew he had her.

“Very simple. You're registered until the end of the week. Enjoy yourself for the next two days, get on your plane and go back to France. At the Paris transit, don't take the connection to Grenoble. I'll meet you at the airport. If I'm not there, get in the *last* taxi. The driver will be a man with side-whiskers. Trust him implicitly.”

“Is that all? How does that help you?”

Her air of disappointment wasn't lost on him. This was going to work.

“You'll be carrying the insert.”

“I'm *not* sticking anything up my ass – not even for

*la France!*”

“*Ah chérie*, we weren't thinking of your pretty little *fesses*. ”

Her chin rose defiantly.

“How dare you – how dare you – *salopard* – you bastard!”

And then the humor of it overcame her indignation at his cheek and they both collapsed into each other's arms with laughter. He gently kissed her neck, she moved it against her lips, their mouths found each other's, exploring, then hungry, passionate, then desperate. They tore off each other's clothes and he put his mouth on her breast and could hear her heart hammering against his ear, which excited him even more. She held him in her hand and he swelled to an excruciating hardness and she wanted him right then and there, on the carpet. When he penetrated, her first cries were those of relief and they changed to animal pants of primeval coupling mingled with his grunts, and then he was the expert older lover, leading her to unknown heights of passion. When they climaxed her tears were not those of a woman in love but a woman whose lust had been served. They gently disengaged and caressed each other's bodies, learning, exploring, and then his head was between her legs and ecstasy became a concept as they poured into each other, mingled and fused.

The night air was chilly and he padded nude to the window to shut it, then picked her up gently and took her to the bed. They lay under the sheet, sipping their Champagne. She dipped a finger in her glass, and brought it to his lips. He sucked it, then did the same for

## BLOOD MONEY

her. They kissed, sighed, kissed again.

"You're an excellent lover. You must have had many women! Have you ever been married?"

"No."

"I suppose not. It wouldn't be professional!"

He chuckled.

"You're the most passionate, the most exciting woman I've ever been to bed with."

She wasn't sure that it was the truth, but it pleased her all the same.

"You're in quite a bit of danger, and you don't have a gun."

"Guns are noisy and messy, and hard to carry onto planes."

"Maybe I should go with you."

"You saved my life once, but it might not work again. I'll nip over to the bathroom and get you the insert."

Her eyes narrowed and had a sly faraway look

"Do it here," she commanded, her voice husky with anticipation.

"Get a tissue and hold it under my ass," he instructed.

She reached into the drawer by the bedside and took a paper tissue out. He turned his back to her, and desire welled up in her at the play of muscles in his back, the firm hard buttocks. He drew his knees up to his chest in the fetus position. She restrained her impulse to nip the cheek of his buttock, and waited with bated breath. He sucked in his stomach muscles, took a deep breath and went into a series of mild convulsions. A rubber cylinder the size of a woman's tampon popped out into the palm of her hand. There



was a slight hiss of escaping air, a vaguely fetid whiff.

“Go and wash it.”

The amusement in his voice was undisguised.

She ran hot water over it in the sink, washed it with soap, then her Vidal Sassoon shampoo for dry and greasy hair. She was embarrassed now. She dried the insert, then took it back to the bedroom, avoiding his gaze.

“This is top-secret, *raison d'état*. You don't want to leave it around. You don't even want to think about it. Insert it now.”

She looked straight into his steady blue eyes. Her green eyes were smoky with desire, her voice throaty and urgent.

“Later, just before you leave.”

She lay in bed watching him dress. The way he shrugged into his shirt, buttoned his trousers, moving his hips for a more comfortable fit. It was nice to see a man in your bedroom getting dressed, but not nice to think he might be getting dressed for his funeral. She put on a brave smile.

Redford looked cool, detached, as though he was a middle manager leaving his suburban house for a business meeting. He turned the light off, and bent to kiss her. The kiss lasted a fraction longer than the ritual morning kiss of a suburban couple. Then he was gone. Just like that. Two steps to the balcony and he was swallowed up by the balmy Guadeloupean night. A slight crunch of gravel, then silence.

She was frightened now. Her father had talked to

## BLOOD MONEY

her of being frightened, hiding in a grotto in the Vercors with a regiment of Wehrmacht soldiers jabbing their bayonets with Teutonic rigor into every bush.

At the age of six, Nathalie had gone to sleep in a little cave not far from the farm. When she woke up it had been pitch dark, and she had wedged her foot in a crack. She had screamed with a terror she relived in recurring nightmares. Her father had found her and she could remember the masculine smell and strength of his sinews, and her mother's hot soup. She was the daughter of a Resistance hero, a mountain guide and warrior. She was a Le Viallon of the Vercors and why was she scared and curled up under the sheet in the fetus position?

A car started up with a roar, there was the distinct sound of a shot in the night. Another engine roared. She sat bolt upright in bed, sheet clutched to her breasts, heart hammering. She could tell no one of the operation – she was all alone – she couldn't even scream. *Her father – she just had to tell him she was scared because she had heard the sound of a shot – he would wonder but not ask questions ... if only he was here.*

There was the telephone! She reached out to call her parents. Just then the phone squeaked and she jumped, dropping it. *Oh God what's happening to me! A jumble of nerves* she screamed inside her head and bent to pick up the instrument: "Allo!"

"See you in Paris, Nathalie. Take care. *Bisous.*"

Redford switched off the cellular phone and handed it back to his controller in the plush comfort of the

Citroen XM as it sped him to safety.

The phone went dead in Nathalie's hand and her heartbeat increased in cadence. There was no anger at the terse message. That would come later. At this time there was only relief *Ididn'tsendhimtohisdeathIdidn'tIdidn'tIDIDN'T!* Her hand rubbed her rounded belly to evoke his warmth. She flopped on the bed on her stomach and buried her face in a pillow.

Three days later, pushing her two suitcases on a trolley, Nathalie walked out of terminal Four at Orly airport outside Paris. Airports always overwhelmed her. An enormous glut of self-centered humanity jellied around her with distorted voices on the tannoy determinedly interweaving to ensure her headache. If she felt a little bewildered, however, she didn't show it in her pink floral print dress with its interesting neckline. Her face held the vague smile more typical of the English than the French. She went down the line of taxis to the last one, a gray Mercedes. The driver, a tall, lean Parisian with white whiskers, hopped out.

"*Voila madame!* I've been waiting for you, but I couldn't get to the head of the line. Driver's ethics, you know," he added in a loud voice for the benefit of the other taxi drivers.

"*Merci, Pierre,*" she replied with a brilliant smile, playing the game, even making up a name.

Pierre expertly threw her bags into the boot, held the door open for her, and sizzled out of the line of waiting taxis. The entire operation had taken under a minute,

## BLOOD MONEY

accomplished with absolute discretion.

Nathalie looked at her watch. It was 11.15.

“Is the insert safe, *chérie*?” Redford’s voice casually demanded.

“Oh!” she gasped.

“Yes, it’s me,” affirmed the driver.

“How ... you ... ”

“Just a bit of disguise,” he laughed. “Not here,” he protested as she flung her arms around his neck. “The insert?”

“I’ve got it,” she pouted from the back seat as he overtook a black BMW on the ring road in the direction of Paris. “You can check later,” she added suggestively.

“I will, honey,” he murmured in English. “And we’ve got a surprise for you.”

Nathalie’s surprise was a three-day breathless whirl of Paris. Champagne and flowers in their suite at the George the Fifth, dinner at Foucault’s and La Tour d’Argent, mad moments of intense sex, dedicated Parisian snogging along the leafy banks of the Seine followed by candle-lit dinner on the *bateau mouche* boats plying the river, followed by a tidal wave of Gallic political humor at the *theatre d’ânes* – the donkey’s theatre – and lovemaking and sex and waking up to the smell of fresh coffee and croissants rich with butter.

And on the afternoon of the last day they had high tea at W.H.Smith’s replica of an English tearoom and walked along the stone arcade of the Rue du Rivoli past the jewelers’ shops, window-shopping in silence with their arms around each other’s waists. Her eyes lit

up at a sapphire and diamond peacock brooch set in gold. Overruling her gasps of protest, he went in and bought it for a small fortune, explaining that it was the high point of her surprise from a grateful intelligence service whose name she still did not know and maybe never would. It was like something out of popular fiction and it was actually happening to her. Redford – she couldn't bring herself to call him anything else – pinned the brooch to her orange silk shirt worn over tight jeans. His hands gently brushed her bra-less breast and she knew it was no accident. They made love one last time, but it was in silence, their last farewell to each other, and at the airport she whispered: "Will I see you again?"

"Maybe – maybe soon – who knows?" he whispered back into her dark blonde hair, which smelled of fresh flowers – her Vidal Sassoon shampoo.

The little A320 plane flying her to Grenoble brought her back to reality. Jean-Jacques was over, Redford was back on his James Bond jaunts, and she would go back to marking papers and worrying over the future of adolescent children of indifferent parents saddled upon overworked and underpaid civil servants ... which was one way of describing a school teacher today.

The airport of Saint Geoirs looked tacky and provincial after her Great Romantic Interlude, but driving to Grenoble in her Peugeot 205, she was assailed by the beauty of the city in the Isère valley surrounded by its Alps – the Belledone massif and Vercors plateau facing each other with the Chartreuse

## BLOOD MONEY

on the other side and she was hit by a pang of loneliness in her gut, thinking of herself by herself. And it was worse when she entered her apartment in the Galeries des Baladins. It had only one bedroom, but was spacious, with a large kitchen and mod cons, a small study with an HP Omnibook on the desk, spacious windows overlooking a park, and a small balcony with a view of the Belledone where she could sunbathe nude. It was perfectly insulated, and she pressed a few controls on her Omnibook which was a home center controlling everything from accounts to her lessons to her Sony super Hi-fi and TV set. The networking was Jean-Jacques' last act of generosity.

Before she could sigh and feel sorry for herself, the majestic lament of the Pier Gynt filled the apartment. She took off all her clothes, dropping them on the floor, went to the bathroom, and ran herself a bath, then to the fridge and poured herself a cold Heineken. She thought of her mail, which she had just plonked on the dining table. She sat down on a chair, moved her bare bottom a little for a more comfortable seat, and started chucking the flyers on the floor. All the reduced prices in DIY shops and free-range chickens and pork and bargain wines seemed tawdry and boring. Three post-cards from different friends, two of them happily married, and she felt thumped in the gut again and then ashamed of her envy. The *Nouvel Observator* asking her to renew her subscription, a telephone bill, and a letter with the CNRS stamp on it. That was strange.

CNRS stands for *Center Nationale de Recherche Scientifique*, which means National Center for Scientific Research. It is a massive organisation with about

twenty-seven thousand researchers all over France, distributed by department. The word scientific is misleading, since in French it is a general term and not one opposing the sciences to the humanities. All subjects from languages to literature to biology to information science to agriculture, require fundamental research. And the CNRS is engaged in fundamental research of a very high order. The Grenoble CNRS and participating universities had claimed several Nobel prizes over the past few decades, with accolades for their work into superconductivity. The CNRS is made up of a mixture of permanent staff and staff retained for the duration of a research project. When needed, every researcher is an authorized research assistant, often drawn from the teaching establishment. Talented foreigners seeking research grants are welcomed.

Nathalie's puzzlement grew when she read the letter from the CNRS. All teachers in French National Education are civil servants, with a civil service rank. *Professeur* is the highest rank at university – the equivalent of a University Don.

The letter was signed Clément Dufour. Hmm. Never heard of him – a professor of the social sciences, which made him a sociologist. He claimed to have read her master's thesis, which was on the monastic life of the Chartreuse monks, an order founded by Saint Bruno of Cologne in the 11th century. Local legends insist that Cartusian precursors of the same order had forged Charlemagne's sword in the 8th century – Charlemagne, who founded the Western Empire. The forge today has evolved into the *Acieries de Bonpertuis*, supplying the best knife-blades for deep-

## BLOOD MONEY

sea divers and combat swimmers of the world's elite special forces. The Acieries Bonpertuis are near Grenoble, and the headquarters of the Chartreuse monks is in the Chartreuse range overlooking Grenoble valley.

Nathalie had convinced her tutor that writing the thesis in English on a French subject would synthesize French and English cultures, thereby being research work useful to the European Union member countries. Her approach had been psychological. It had taken into account the effect of entering and leaving a monastic order. For psychology, she had applied Jung and Lacan. In interpreting the documentary research, she had used the mainstream French critical disciplines of structural anthropology without ignoring American deconstruction or Umberto Eco's semiotic science.

The letter from professor Dufour was long, and stimulated her interest. She turned the music down, taking pleasure in her nudity and suddenly pleased she could be naked without a man raking his eyes over her. Professor Dufour knew her thesis thoroughly, and apparently her teaching as well – he complimented her on using it as a basis for handling her students with 'finesse'. Now how did he know that – *tch – simple –* spoke to her school principal and head of department etc.. Okay. Wait – wow! *She* was being invited to work for the CNRS! She couldn't believe it! On impulse she picked up the phone and punched her parents' number. They were delighted, just to hear the change in her voice, to hear her talking of the future with enthusiasm. Her mother wanted her to come right over, but then relented. She respected her daughter's desire to be by



herself and think over the offer, but did insist that she come over for the weekend for some decent farm cooking.

Nathalie stepped into the bath. She liked the feel of the foamy warm water against her legs. She stroked her thighs with pleasure and slid into the bubbles.

Next morning she rang for an appointment. The professor was friendly over the phone, and they fixed an appointment for the following week. She spent a lazy weekend with her parents. They knew something had happened she didn't want to talk about. Her father observed her shrewdly. Funnily enough, she radiated the same faraway confidence as the girls active in the Resistance. Hmmm. She was his daughter and had just been through emotional hell and the money he had given her had not been wasted. Nathalie's mother heaped mounds of the creamy dauphinois cooking on her plate. Tourte de Saumon, blanquette d'agneau, gratin dauphinois, pommes dauphiné, a laden cheese platter, fruit tarts and cream and wines from the farm's well-stocked cellar. Her mother was stout and indomitable and overjoyed that her daughter had lost the air of fury she had lately taken to wrapping herself in.

Sunday afternoon Nathalie's sister came over with her husband and two children and the dog. They had a barbecue amid the cherry and walnut trees in the meadow on the lower slopes of the farm overlooking the meander of the foamy mountain torrent that cut through their land. The children's squeals and grandparents' joy and her sister's symphonic family relationship touched Nathalie. She felt a little sad and

## BLOOD MONEY

isolated, and then guilty for feeling that way. And then she felt joyful. At the end of the day, her father mellow and her mother fulfilled, they all sat around Gérard and Virginie to listen to their favorite story of the Second World War. That it wasn't about blood and guts but intrepidity under the Bosche nose to save a symbol made it very typical of the French Gallic tradition. At the place Saint André in Grenoble, in the square overlooked by the county courts and Café de la Table Ronde – Stendhal's watering hole – is the 150-year-old statue of the cavalier Bayard, paladin of the 15th century, the cavalier 'above reproach and beyond fear'. The name inspired the most dashing character of Faulkner's Sartoris family and is second only to Roland in chivalry, another influence on Faulkner. Bayard, Seigneur de Terrail, was also Connétable of the Dauphin region of which Grenoble is the headquarters.

When the Germans occupied France, they were a little late in coming to Grenoble. Resistance cells had already been formed, and the Le Viallons were part of one. Virginie, Nathalie's mother, had been an assistant cook in the kitchens of the Alpine Regiment then quartered in the Bastille overlooking Grenoble. She became an expert in the underground passages carved by the Romans, one of which was an uncharted maze. Gérard, Nathalie's father, had helped her chart it for fun while courting her. That gave them exclusive rights to the maze, and practically under the thorough noses of the merciless Germans, they had spirited the statue away and hidden it under the Bastille, in what they called 'our maze'. The statue survived the war to become a legend of Gallic panache. Characteristically,

the Le Viallons refused a decoration for the act. Equally in character, they still kept the secret of the maze. It was in the family Bible on the worn shelf above the kitchen chimney, and the girls knew it but had never been allowed to see it. On the anniversary of the day they saved Grenoble's honor, the old couple would open a bottle of Champagne and toast the event with the girls. Over the ritual sips, Gérard would recount the myth. The girls would be sent off to bed, and then, and only then, did the couple remove their sacred relic from the family Bible.

Once again, the stirring myth overlaid the evening air, in their family meadow overlooked by silent escarpments that sparingly filtered the last rays of the blood orange sun. It felt good to be French.

Grenoble University was founded in the 14th century, but the site of the present campus housing nearly thirty colleges and participating institutions was built on a drained marsh bordering the lazy meanders of the river Isère. Its 444 acres of lawn are dotted with modern architecture surrounded by leafy trees, well-kept flower beds and ornamental bushes. Its fifty thousand students crowd the corridors, rushing from lectures to tutorials, or hold animated discussions in sun-dappled corners. The bus services into town are regular, and the campus is linked by rail and an ultra-modern tram service.

Nathalie parked her white Peugeot 205 in the space reserved for visitors to the CNRS housed on campus. Being summer, there weren't many cars, and besides,

## BLOOD MONEY

eight in the morning was early. She was dressed in one of those very smart, very attractive summer suits that seem to crop up every season. This one consisted of a skirt up to mid thigh and a double-breasted top. Deep yellow was one of her colors, and as long as she kept her body language in check, the neckline couldn't be called plunging. Her natural tan made her look wealthy, which she wasn't by a long way. As usual she carried no handbag, but the man's briefcase held a few papers and notes she had made while rereading her master's thesis last week.

The busy, bespectacled secretary handled her with the kind of efficiency that comes only from having been a star pupil at a secretarial college. Nathalie was inserted into Dufour's office with effortless ease and the door shut behind her.

The man who rose from behind his desk was tall, broad shouldered, lean in the waist, with high cheek bones and steel rimmed glasses under an iron-gray crew-cut. The knot in his summer tie was impeccable, his white collar starched, the light summer blazer cut to perfection, and the Oxfords from Drucker's polished. He looked more like a general in civvies than a sociologist. Nathalie patted her hair because he was the sort of man who made girls want to pat their hair.

She took his proffered hand, and his smile was friendly, almost paternal.

"Thank you for coming, Madame Le Viallon."

"Pleased to meet you."

The office was large enough to be comfortable, with

a Formica desk and two large windows with a pleasant view of the campus grounds and a fine old walnut tree. The files stacked on the desk betrayed none of the academic's usual disregard for tidiness. At the other end of the room, three padded straight-backed chairs were arranged around a small round table of synthetic material. The floor was covered by a standard gray carpet.

With a well-practiced gesture he motioned her to one of the chairs.

"I'll get straight down to the purpose of our visit. I read your master's thesis, and was struck by your insight into the psychology of entering and leaving a monastic order. My current interest lies in a parallel phenomenon. Members of terrorist organizations, elite forces and intelligence organizations have a lot in common with monks. They are married to their little pseudo-orders, and even when they marry women, the divorce rate is very high. While they are active members of their respective organizations, they belong to the organization body and soul. They give of themselves completely, leading to emotional depreciation. To compensate for the deterioration, they involve themselves even more deeply in the organization ..."

"... so it creates a vicious circle ..."

"... something drawn out very clearly in your research work."

The tone was almost a rebuke, and Nathalie mentally warned herself to listen quietly. This was not a man who welcomed interruptions that might lead to digression. There was the faint sound of a car horn in

## BLOOD MONEY

the distance.

“As the vicious circle progresses, the individual starts decreasing the emotional collateral, and reaches a used-up stage. In the case of priests, it leads to self-doubts, possible renunciation of the order, and even loss of faith. In the case of intelligence agents ...” and here something tinkled in Nathalie’s mind “... and elite soldiers and terrorists, the process conducts them to the threshold of defection. I call it the watershed. At this stage they need resuscitation from the parent organization, if they are to survive to their own advantage and that of the parent organization.”

Redford seemed to be doing well. She uncrossed her legs.

“Last year I was studying military reports and documents at the Military Studies Center at Montpellier University. The purpose was the same as yours in studying monks. At the Military Studies Center, there was a major from the *1er Régiment Etranger de Cavalerie* – the First Foreign Regiment of Cavalry of the French Foreign Légion. He drew my attention to the idea of monasticism actually *promoted* within the Légion as a virtue. The term *la vie monastique* is one of the tenets of Légion faith. Légionnaires see themselves as an order of warrior monks, which is absolutely true.”

He was pleasurably intrigued to note the agreement in Nathalie’s eyes. Barring a few die-hard anti-militarists, most French people had this peculiarly ambivalent love-hate attitude towards the Légion – hero-worshipping Légionnaires as a bunch of devil-may-care cut-throats who had helped build the French empire and shed their foreign blood under the tricolor,

yet refusing to grant them social recognition.

After all, an attack Doberman is not invited to dinner.

“These descendants of the Knights Templar are handled by NCOs and officers with techniques of applied psychology unknown to academic circles. The result is that the over one hundred nationalities serving in the Légion have earned the accolade of the finest mercenary force in the world.”

“But Légionnaires aren’t mercenaries!” Nathalie hastened to protest.

“What are they, then?”

“Foreign soldiers under French colors!” she stoutly defended.

“And what’s a mercenary?”

“Someone who fights only for money. Légionnaires have tradition, ritual, health care, pensions ...”

“*Ma chère madame Le Viallon,*” he gently interrupted. “How would you define a soldier enlisted under a foreign flag?”

“Hard to say, but ...”

“France does not employ mercenaries,” he continued with a satisfied smile. “Doesn’t need to. Therefore we cannot define Légionnaires as mercenaries, for fear of admitting we actually need foreign help. We don’t have the same attitude if they are engineers or street cleaners. The word mercenary, especially in French, has negative connotations, and most people who like quoting Machiavelli on the subject have never read him, and cheerfully quote him out of context.”

He cleared his throat.

“In fact, many governments do employ foreign

## BLOOD MONEY

soldiers. There is the Spanish Légion – Spain wants to offer them as a key strike force for the European Army. And don't forget the Gurkha regiments in Britain, India, Singapore and Brunei. The Gulf states have tended to employ Pakistani Baluchis, Saudi Arabia's infantry recruitment is biased towards Somalians and their Air Force is littered with Pakistani pilots – I could go on and on.”

She nodded primly.

“At recruitment, a Légionnaire is a foreigner enlisting for all sorts of reasons, the least of which is money, which is why the salary is kept modest, to ensure against purely mercenary motives. During the course of his contract, the Légionnaire develops affection and love for his regiment, then the Légion. Eventually, this affection is naturally transferred to France. At that moment the Légionnaire becomes a French soldier, and this is usually followed by a demand for citizenship ...”

There was a gentle knock. The professor looked up as the secretary's head peeped around the door.

“*Café, Monsieur?*”

“Not yet, *merci!*”

The head disappeared and the door was shut noiselessly.

Nathalie noted that the professor did not appear displeased by this interruption. *Hmm. Likes being looked after!* He continued with a discreetly Gallic hand gesture.

“At gun-point, you can force a soldier to kill – but if he isn't motivated to die, he can't cross the line from executioner to soldier. When these Légionnaires reach



the watershed, they are *handled*. I studied this phenomenon with the major, and the documentation center had your work indexed, which we found relevant to our study. The major and I further discussed your work with Ebert, your tutor.”

Nathalie smiled at the reference to her tutor.

“I recently made inquiries at your school and learnt, to my great delight, that you are considered to be exceptionally gifted in handling difficult adolescents, especially ones from unstable families.”

“Thank you.”

Dufour graciously inclined his head. The shadow of a pigeon flying past the window briefly flitted over the carpet.

“We will now talk about my next project,” he intoned. Nathalie smiled inwardly at the academic’s choice of words. There was no *we will talk*, only *I’ll lecture and you listen!*

“However, the project is classified top-secret. If you are willing to sign a secrecy document at the end of our discussion, I can reveal it to you. If not, our discussion ends here.”

He paused.

“I agree to sign the secrecy document,” Nathalie said solemnly.

He looked pleased, but not surprised.

“The project is a study of hostile agents and terrorists who are sometimes sent to French universities to compensate for the watershed factor. French intelligence sources estimate that summer courses on French campuses are the favorite choice. *These* individuals have no hostile intent, but are sent

## BLOOD MONEY

on a sort of rest and recreation program after which they are weaned back into their organizations.

“The ethos of the project is that if they are ready to be weaned back into their parent organizations, then some of them should be ready to be weaned *into* our organizations. I would like the study to highlight certain predominant characteristics in the behavioral pattern of the subjects we study. Common predominant traits regularly repeated would allow individuals ripe for defection to be identified by our security agencies. Obviously, our agencies will have to be extremely circumspect about selection and approach. The slightest hint, and these people will stop choosing *la belle France* for R&R. If you decide to refuse the offer of the CNRS, the document you sign will bind you to secrecy with very serious consequences in case of a breach of security.”

“All that’s fine. But I don’t know the CNRS offer.”

She blinked her large eyes at him and he simpered inwardly. *Très charmante!*

“*Bon,*” he smiled. “While being a civil servant of the National Education Ministry, you will be deputed to the CNRS to study the effect of loneliness on foreign students. Your salary will be twenty percent higher than it is now, with all professional expenses taken care of. With a modem at home, you only need to come here when necessary, although a small study will be provided on our premises. And I dare say,” he added with a twinkle, “there will be neither papers to mark nor grumpy parents to see, and you get three months off every year while you’re on secondment. How does that sound?”

“Much more than I’d been expecting,” Nathalie replied, unable to mask the anticipation in her eyes. Once again Dufour’s shrewdly noticed the reaction and filed it away.

“When do you want my answer?”

“Shall we say in a couple of days? If it is yes, then you’ll have to sign a contract, which requires approval from the Education Ministry, but all that’s routine bureaucracy.”

Nathalie nodded. Through the window, her peripheral vision caught the leaves of the gracious walnut tree stirring gently. She smiled politely at the professor. The professor decided it was time for a more personal exchange.

“Would you like a cup of coffee?”

The secretary served them both with detached efficiency. Nathalie and the professor had a pleasant chat over coffee, which rapidly moved from watershed psychology to a wide variety of subjects, mostly political, with emphasis on the political future of the European Union with regard to the existing nation-states. This was no lecture, but dialogue, with Nathalie doing most of the talking. Unknown to her, her ideas and personality were being dissected by a past master in the art of interrogation.

Nathalie accepted the contract, and the project was activated in two weeks. It was off to a good start, and Nathalie and the professor forged a warm professional relationship heading towards friendship.

One night the doorbell rang and it was Redford. He

## BLOOD MONEY

looked tired but was still a superb lover, and this time they used a rubber. He stayed three days, at the end of which they realized they would never have a permanent relationship but a deep friendship and marvelous sex. He also confessed that his organization had pulled strings to get her the post of research assistant at the CNRS, although the name of the organization was still withheld from her.

The research was going well, and she found a partner to bed from time to time. Avoiding the commitment of a personal relationship, she made sure she used a rubber. That was a little less exciting than bare skin, but AIDS was a nightmare.

Shortly after Christmas, Redford rang. Could she do one of his friends a favor – nothing much? She readily agreed. The friend was a female voice over the phone with an American accent. Nathalie agreed to allow a *poste restante* package to be addressed to her, then took the package up to the Chartreuse monastery and handed it over to an olive-skinned monk in a funny hat – a visiting Copt from Egypt.

By the end of the year the research project was near completion, and she realized she was running all sorts of vague and ambiguous errands for the American-accented female voice over the phone.

Redford visited again, and over a candle-lit dinner at the Petit Paris confessed that he *had* got her running errands for his organization. But was it that bad a thing? *For God's sake I don't even know the name of your organization or its address. You don't trust me. I'm just being used!*

He was gentle and soothing, and his logic was

inescapable. She could be a permanent research assistant at the CNRS, working for Dufour, who, of course, knew nothing about Redford's organization. *Like hell!* But she didn't say anything. Redford was persuasive. She would be forever free of marking papers and defusing sulky parents. Against her will, she would never be exposed to danger. However, if she was willing, she could go on a short commando course in the Pyrenees. To keep herself trim, she could take out membership of the Grenoble shooting club and a martial arts club.

Reeled in with a light touch, Nathalie Le Viallon soon became a highly competent agent for an unknown organization of dappled light and shadows. Twice she proved her prowess with gun and body weapons, and was commended by the American-accented voice, followed by a bonus. Her research was valued, and other projects of a similar nature followed. Of course she was involved with the organization, and some of her research would never be published. The funny thing was, she actually enjoyed it, and Jean-Jacques quickly became another memory. If her parents – both Resistance fighters – noticed a change in her that held a whiff of times gone by, they held their peace.

## CHAPTER THREE

In France, studies in political science are highly prestigious. Only nine universities retain an Institute of Political Science. Based on a limited number of seats, the entrance exam is exigent, with a competitive *concours* designed to screen and eventually select the mandarins of France's exclusive civil service and private sector elite. Four years of hard work which might lead to graduate studies, and candidates sit for competitive civil service exams. The Foreign Service, among others, attracts many candidates. They may also transfer their industriousness to one of the *grandes écoles*, allowing them to enter the highest circles of bureaucratic power in government or industry. The best-known Institute of Political Science is, of course, Paris, with the prestige of the Sorbonne to prop it up. However, academically, Grenoble University's *Institut des Etudes Politiques* – the IEP – is rated higher. Its research interests are varied, profound and most scholarly. It is here that the US 8th Army in Germany chooses to send a young lieutenant every year to 'improve his French'.

That same lieutenant can be found a few years later with a couple more bars on his shoulders or in a civilian suit serving in one of the embassy posts which are a

cover for intelligence work. Needless to say, while 'improving his French', this young lieutenant spends more time than is necessary in the well-stocked and superbly indexed library of the institute.

The library is situated in the East wing of the IEP building. The main entrance is a modern structure nearly opposite the university restaurant. Enter the main hall and there are two flights of stairs on either hand. The one on the left leads to the registrar's office, and is that usually taken by visitors. On the first floor, just before the corridor turns left towards the offices, there is a three yards by four yards Formica obstruction. The color is that of walnut wood, and blends discreetly with its surroundings.

A casual visitor in a hurry to get to the IEP offices would take no notice. A keen observer would not fail to take in the little notice that bars unauthorized entrants, nor the little Judas window. The keen observer would wonder why an academic institute in the humanities should have a restricted area, and a close look would reveal that the Formica cleverly hides a steel door. Interesting. What goes on behind these steel doors is unknown to the public. In fact, this part of the institute deals with highly sensitive research and analyses that are of interest to the state in determining foreign policy. Sometimes, under the guise of a symposium or congress, the restricted area may accommodate a meeting of a confidential nature that would be compromised elsewhere. As long as the organizers of such a meeting possess the credentials of a reputable research organization – with a budget to match, of course – have common interests with the IEP, and are

## BLOOD MONEY

willing to share their research, the institute allows them use of the restricted area.

The Schengen Group is one such organization, taking its name from the Schengen Accords signed in 1985. The heads of the European Union states convened a conference in Schengen, the exact geographical center of the EU member-states. They decided, in principle, that the result of a judicial or police investigation in one country would be upheld by other member countries. The law would be equally applicable to inquiries into terrorism, drug smuggling and fake political refugees flitting from one country to another. The eventual definition of the European Union would be determined by the results of a political tussle, but the law and order problem was real, linked as it was to drug trafficking and the activities of radical Islamists, especially the Algerians, who had started breaking ground for their network across Europe – a network designed to facilitate their access to arms and also to pressure European governments to withdraw support for the military junta in power.

At Schengen, one of the several dinners included only the heads of state of Britain, France and Germany. They agreed to put their political differences aside on the law and order issue, crucial to their common survival. Five weeks after the conclusion of the Schengen Accords, the heads of the intelligence and counter-intelligence services of Britain, France and Germany met in utmost secrecy on one of the small, unmarked channel islands between Britain and France. They had received verbal orders from their respective heads of state. Orders to act as a single force, without



any back up legislation. The very fact that this force would comprise three jealously competing powers was insurance against its misuse. For reasons of security, other European nations would remain unaware of the existence of this group until such time as the Maastricht Treaty's future was definitively determined. They agreed to nominate a selected number of personnel to form a small nucleus, the existence of which would never be admitted. Not difficult, when everything was oral, nothing recorded.

When a consensus of action had been reached, the head of British intelligence uncrossed her svelte legs, leaned back, and lazily asked if such a group was possible without American participation. Her question was logical but the motive reflected British policy within the EU. Electronic intelligence, the drug war and the Cold War had deeply interlinked American and European intelligence operations. Most of the basic satellite intelligence was provided by the Americans. The political motives of the British Intelligence chief were very obvious, and the French and German heads exchanged looks. The British intelligence community referred to the Americans as 'cousins', and British politicians systematically pit the US against the EU to keep the City of London near the epicenter of world finance. At the same time, London astutely played the Americans' European Game.

Britain's European Game apart, the logic of the idea was inescapable, and with the approval of the three heads of state, the Americans were involved as the fourth party. Cooperation between the anti-terrorist teams was started immediately, as was the Franco-

## BLOOD MONEY

German brigade of the regular armies. At social gatherings, the heads of the intelligence services brought their influence to bear on judges and police officers. It was selective and discreet, which is why it was effective. And, of course, the Germans had already put the facilities of their central police computer in Hamburg at the disposal of Interpol and Western police forces. After a while, as might be supposed, the need to form some sort of nucleus to maintain the impetus of the new idea became an imperative, with, of course, iron-clad guarantees of security. Thus the idea of the Schengen Group engendered itself. Grenoble became its headquarters by a peculiar quirk of fate.

Wolfgang Richter, the German representative, was a keen field hockey player and interested in community work. He trained two different hockey teams in Munich, and was delighted to respond to an invitation from the Grenoble hockey team. The timing coincided with the need for the Schengen Group to meet. The British member, Chris Holingworth, was no longer an active hockey player, but *had* played for Oxford. Alain de Cambourg, the French member, occasionally played a game of ice hockey with Gallic zest, and he was still a dedicated fan. The fourth member, the American, was a woman, Agatha Collins, an East Coast WASP from a Boston Brahmin family of tight-fisted bankers. Passionate skier and devoted follower of the peregrine falcon. Grenoble and the adjoining Vercors national park attracted her like a magnet.

That first year of the Schengen Group's meeting, Grenoble, Gateway to the Alps and the Sports Capital of France, was a logical choice. The Schengen Four

spent enough time involved in sports to justify their cover. The rest of the time was devoted to the serious business of security in the EU. In the light-and-shadows world, one of the two is leaky. A blend of both is dappled, projects a sense of security, and is more secure. Half-truths endure longer than complete lies. Elaborate security precautions draw attention and compromise security. Consequently, the Schengen Group was openly registered with the Grenoble Prefecture as an association. French law requires three members and a nominal registration fee. The same law obliges the Town Council to provide premises and even funds. De Cambourg was secretly pleased that without any intriguing on his part, the Schengen Group would be headquartered in France.

Registering as an association would allow the Group to admit its existence while denying its activities, a well-crafted fundamental of the theory of plausible denial. The Group then proceeded to develop contacts with the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques*. Their declared intention was to study laws related to EU security. A list of members from the academic communities of the three countries was drawn up, and their participation solicited. By the end of the first year, an innocent and well-meaning think tank of lawyers, judges and professors and been filled. The finances originated from a variety of non-profit organizations and grants from the European Union under its Erasmus project. The results of their studies were published in a newsletter circulated all over Europe. The four members of the real Schengen Group found these studies in themselves eminently useful, and parallel

## BLOOD MONEY

with the academic organization, ran an action wing hand-picked from the anti-terrorist units of the United States, Britain, France and Germany. This wing carried out top-secret missions that did not exclude the possibilities of extreme terminal action.

In the second year, one of the academic members, Dufour, a noted scholar and researcher for the French CNRS, was invited to be the fifth member of the Schengen Nucleus. In public and in private, he had displayed a remarkable astuteness in analyzing the psychology and predicting the moves of radical Islamic organizations. He had also convinced the other members of the Schengen Nucleus that the various radical organizations were linked by a common policy, with communications maintained by a system of couriers carrying verbal messages.

Operation Lodestar, a clandestine operation planned by Dufour in meticulous detail, had been accepted by the Group. Subsequently, the Action Wing had kidnapped three suspected couriers posing as missionaries. Under expert and close interrogations, they had confirmed the existence of a communist link maintained by couriers. The financing came from petro and narco dollars. The action squads were Arab or Sudanese, trained by the Pakistan Army Special Services Group in camps that had been meant to train Afghan guerrillas fighting the CIA's war by proxy.

This April day was a good time for the Schengen Nucleus to meet. The last of the skiing season and beginning of the hockey season secured their cover. The agenda of the meeting purported to discuss the schedule of a series of summer conferences to be run

by the academic members in return for generous grants from certain foundations and the EU. Unwittingly, the academics would end up assessing and being in contact with foreign participants. The actual purpose of the meeting was more serious.

Dufour sat at one end of the table, with Agatha Collins at the other end. Her brown wavy hair, wide forehead, and freckled ski-jump nose under merry brown eyes and well-maintained but full figure fitted the image of a prosperous Irish farmer's wife in her early forties. The impression suited her cover, and belied the razor-sharp brain and absence of sentiment in operations. Her husband was a successful dentist in Washington, and only knew that she was a researcher at the CIA, and had to travel. Their two children were at an exclusive prep school in South Carolina.

Wolfgang Richter was in his fifties, with the lean figure and natty clothes of a bachelor who thoroughly enjoyed being one. At six foot two, in his tailored blazer and paisley cravat, he looked like a highly successful stockbroker on a weekend, rather than a career police officer with a fearsome reputation. His handsome features and rakish temperament ensured that he rarely lacked female company.

A devout Catholic and father of three girls and a boy, de Cambourg was in his late forties. Medium height, medium build, well dressed, he looked like a business manager until one gazed into his eyes. They totally lacked expression. For ten years he had headed the *service action* of French Foreign Intelligence, personally leading several missions of the 11th Choc behind the Soviet lines. He came from a wealthy

## BLOOD MONEY

aristocratic family with vineyards in Burgundy.

Hollingworth retained the sharp smile and honed look of a marine commando officer with service in the Special Boat Squadron. Fifty-one, blond and fit, for the last five years he had headed C-5, Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist unit.

The room they sat in overlooked the campus lawns through a spacious window. The conference room was sound-proof and blast-proof. As additional security, two members of the Action Wing were on duty outside the carpeted room. Another two were in a car parked outside the university restaurant.

Dufour cleared his throat and rubbed his hands. His English was grammatically perfect but the accent unmistakably French. "We might all benefit from a summarized update."

The others acquiesced, and Dufour carried on. "The interrogation of the three couriers confirmed our analysis. The radical Islamic states are in close communication. Ultimate objective: move the center of world influence from the West to the Islamic world. The mainstream countries are allied with the West and Islam. In a conflict of interest, Islamic policy takes priority, but the choice is well hidden. In all cases, the majority of their populations, whether in or out of power, are suspicious of and hostile to the West. Largely illiterate, they still see geographical expansion as the sole means of economic prosperity, and the acquisition of high-tech weapons as its driving force. Two interesting examples:

"When an Islamic country gets too radical, it attracts unwanted Western attention, which risks any long-term

program. When Iraq and Libya became the focus of Western intelligence, their nuclear programs had to be abandoned. By keeping a low profile, Pakistan managed to steal nuclear technology and build a bomb. As a member of NATO, Turkey's staunch pro-Western stance allowed it to acquire a license for the construction of F-16 aircraft, which can carry a nuclear payload. Pakistan has the bomb, Turkey the delivery system, and Iran the guerrillas – all three are bound by the treaty of the Economic Cooperation Organization.”

“Cute, ain't it?” remarked Agatha, eyes dancing.

Dufour had a pedantic side that hated interruptions. He had an equal dislike for ‘unauthorized contractions’ in English.

“*Chère madame.*” Dufour inclined his head in concession to the interruption and continued. “During the Gulf War, Iran, Iraq's sworn enemy, allowed Iraqi pilots to land their planes in Iran. The 270,000 deaths in their ten-year war, as well as the Shia-Sunni antagonism of centuries, were forgotten in order to save part of the Islamic Air Force. Iraq and Libya hate each other, but Sudan played the game of both countries. Sudan accepted training camps on its soil directed by Libya to train Egyptian fundamentalists trying to overthrow the government in power. During the Gulf War, a large number of Iraqi scud missiles found their way to Sudan. There was a Sudanese involved in the World Trade Center bombing in New York, and the team had been trained in Pakistani camps in the Karakorums, without mentioning that the leader, Ramzi, is a Pakistani passport holder. Shortly before the WTC bombing, a Pakistani ambushed CIA

## BLOOD MONEY

employees going to work at their headquarters in Langley. He killed two, wounded sixteen, and *got away!* Despite the so-called cooperation of the Pakistani authorities, the attacker stayed at large in Baluchistan until the fear of being put on the US State Department's list of terrorist states influenced the Pakistanis into letting US law officers arrest him." He concluded with tight lips and paused for a sip of mineral water.

The merriment had left Agatha's eyes. That February in 1993 was not a pleasant memory. The morning of the attack outside Langley, she'd had a flat tire, and missed being ambushed by a hair's breadth. Richter knew she would not interrupt again. She was a most attractive woman.

"In the last two months of his presidency, Bush put Pakistan on the list of terrorist states, but under strong pressure from the state department, rescinded the decision."

"And I wonder why?" gently insinuated de Cambourg.

Holingworth gamely rose to the defense of the Atlantic Alliance. Besides, he was expected to be knowledgeable about the Commonwealth.

"Pakistan has been fomenting trouble for India by supporting the Sikh and Kashmiri separatists. India will not attack Pakistan unless its action can be justified in front of an international court. If the Americans put Pakistan on their list of terrorist states, the Indians would see that as sufficient grounds to attack Pakistan and destroy the guerrilla bases. Anyway, please carry on with the summary."

Dufour once again inclined his head and continued.



“The objectives of the Islamic countries are broad and long-term principles based on the rise and fall of powers. Among themselves, they are bitter rivals. As such, there is no central committee with a headquarters to direct sabotage and infiltration. There are spoken and unspoken agreements. Communication is kept to a minimum, and only activated in case of emergency or to avoid gross duplication of effort. It’s an overseeing operation run by an Oxford-educated Rhodes scholar and contemporary of the American president. He’s a tribal chief in a lost Himalayan kingdom in the Karakorum range of Northern Pakistan. The state is autonomous, between K-2 and Nanga Parbat, the second and third highest peaks in the world. The tribal chief is also revered as a hereditary holy man by his tribe.”

“His mountain fastness is under constant satellite surveillance,” Agatha announced, barely hiding her smugness.

“Thank you,” acknowledged Dufour, and took up the summary. “The Khan of Gunda runs this group known as the *Halqa* which is Arabic for circle. For centuries, his people have been used as assassins in Central and South Asia. Hassan, the Old Man of the Mountains in the 12th century who started the *hashishin* from which the word assassin originates, recruited his elite inner circle from the tribe of Tarangs, who inhabit Gunda.

“They are still hired out by the Khan, who takes payment for it, but the assassins themselves serve a holy cause. Each Khan is believed to be a holy apostle and guardian of Islam.

“The *Halqa* is little known because it only employs

## BLOOD MONEY

assassins to ensure against policy deviation among Muslims. They operate within the Islamic world, policing organizations fighting the West. In that sense, they function as counter-intelligence or thought police. The Khan's people are more resilient and efficient than the Gurkhas, living at an altitude of over ten thousand feet. Mr Hollingworth might like to summarize the British angle ...”

Hollingworth took a sip of water, and cleared his throat. “Our old links in the area have survived the independence of Pakistan. The Karakorums formed part of Northern Kashmir and the North-West Frontier Province, which at any given time during our empire in India, tied up over thirty thousand troops in a permanent anti-guerrilla campaign. This was in spite of our successful efforts to keep the tribes from uniting. Information used to be gained by classical field intelligence. The frontier pashtuns are clear skinned, and it wasn't difficult to infiltrate English agents who live with them as one of them. We still have some English families who are fifth generation agents of MI6 living in the North-West Frontier Province. In name, appearance, genealogical records, these families are 'pure' pashtun. How we managed it is still classified information.

“Unfortunately, we have never been able to place anyone in Gunda itself. The small population, its concentration in three isolated valleys, and tribal unity precluded it. However, our 'pashtun' agents confirm that the state of Gunda has diamond reserves to match those of South Africa or Australia.”

“And official Pakistani surveys obtained by the CIA

in Islamabad confirm these reports,” added Richter.

“That’s right,” agreed Agatha. “And our satellite surveys check it out.”

“French travelers, mountain climbers and photographers report rumours to the effect,” said de Cambourg.

“Gunda is playing a very cagey game, and I’ll pick that up in a minute,” warned Hollingworth. “A word about the Khan. He studied at Oxford and Berkeley during the Sixties. His international contacts among liberals, and of course his credentials, are impeccable. He is a man of tremendous vision and insight. In the Sixties, he could see the Islamic-CIA alliance maturing against the Soviets. He could also see the Islamic-KGB alliance maturing against Israel and the United States. He suggested the *Halqa* to a select handful of Islamic leaders and intellectuals, and they agreed. He got the Pakistan government to run the Karakorum Highway linking China and Pakistan all the way down to the gateway to the Gulf, through other states, leaving his own state sufficiently isolated from the highway for the *Halqa* to function, yet close enough to use the highway for trade and communications.

“His father, the old Khan, had deposited a sizeable quantity of the state treasure with Swiss banks. Using that as collateral, he borrowed a massive amount to thoroughly modernize the educational system of his country. The Gunda assassins can now blend into any European environment with their light skins, clear eyes and accentless English.

“Gunda, like the rest of Pakistan, sub-contracted itself to the CIA to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan.

## BLOOD MONEY

Training camps for the Mujahedin in Gunda were actually camps for radical Islamic groups. The Khan obtained the best and most sophisticated communications equipment. All this while, his state remained closed off to the outside world. Even Pakistan government officials were not allowed unescorted into the state. Pakistan got a nuclear program out of the Afghan war, and created the ultra-modern *Halqa*.

“Now, about the diamonds. These are very old deposits, and in its two thousand year history, Gunda’s secret. The fear of Gunda had always been invasion by the government in power in Delhi. The slightest hint of diamonds, and the state would have ceased to exist. Even the entrance to the mines leads only from the Khan’s bedroom. Yet, geological secrets have little resistance against twentieth century methods. It also suited the Pakistan government to leave the diamonds alone. Since the Fifties, the Pakistani policy had been to keep a low profile with a strong Western stance that would allow it to produce the Islamic Bomb. Just as Gunda was afraid of the rapacious Mughals ruling from Delhi, the Pakistanis were afraid of Wall Street and City appetites. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and creation of the Economic Cooperation Organization of ten Islamic countries, Pakistan feels it can exploit the diamond mines without any fear of Wall Street. Pakistan would also like to get its hands on the *Halqa* and determine certain directions of the Islamic world. Agatha?”

“Sure. The Khan lives in his mountain eyrie. He has equipment and personnel that allow the *Halqa* to listen to almost any radio traffic. The *Halqa*, using equipment

bought on the open market or hijacked by Hizbulla type organizations, can clone onto our own satellites. The Khan also has a cell of a dozen of the best academic minds of all Islam. They monitor the radio and TV news broadcasts of all countries. They analyze selected periodicals and books. A perfect grip on world affairs in their primitive mountain fastness allows them to warn different groups against duplication of effort. Sometimes, to enforce orders, the assassins are sent out under the personal supervision of the Khan. The idea is brilliant in its simplicity.

“However, the good news – if we can make full use of it – is that we’ve found two weak links.

“The *Halqa*’s ability to function depends on electric power. Gunda has no electricity, and the *Halqa*’s equipment runs on a single generator with a back-up, which they brought on yaks over twelve thousand feet high mountain passes and secret trails and assembled in the Khan’s eyrie. The petrol it runs on is brought along the Karakorum Highway and stocked in the cellars of the eyrie. Because of the sub-zero temperatures at that altitude, the cellars need to maintain a certain temperature, which is achieved by electrical heating. Part of the cable linking the generator to the cellars has to run outside the palace wall. It is exposed to a laser beam from one of our ‘star wars’ satellites. In a trial run, the National Security Agency Technicians shot a very low intensity beam at the cable. The result was a power failure the *Halqa* blamed on a mountain storm. We can, by increasing the intensity of the beam, cause a short circuit to run the length of the cable and start a fire in the cellars,

## BLOOD MONEY

which would explode the petrol containers and the whole palace.”

“Why don’t you?” de Cambourg demanded, almost pugnaciously.

“Even if the Khan *is* there, we can’t be certain of killing him. If he survives, he could restart the *Halqa* in one of the neighboring valleys of his state. With a vengeance. So far, his assassins have restricted their mayhem to Muslim targets. A failed operation just might change his mind. He has the resources to unleash an info war of the kind the Rand Corporation organized as a war-game for the Pentagon called The Day After ... in Cyberspace. The villain in the Rand study was Iran, but for Iran, read *Halqa*.

“The second weak link is their computer networking. Each member of the *Halqa* working in the cellar – including the Khan in his office – is linked on a single Asynchronous Transport Mode network known as an ATM switch. The Khan, using a single ATM switch, can hold a video-conference, send a fax or make a phone call. Apparently, there’s a virus in the ATM network. Each time they communicate internally by voice, it leaks into their wireless phone link, which emits signals. One of our surveillance satellites picked up signals three months ago. Operation Achilles is being run under the highest security classification by our National Security Agency — the NSA — that handles hitech Elint ... that’s electronic intelligence.”

She paused to look at Dufour.

“Yes, superb,” he remarked approvingly.

“The situation today is not that bleak,” she continued. “Our Swiss operation has been successful.

The Schengen Group has persuaded the Swiss banks to call in the Khan's outstanding loans. Cornered, the Khan of Gunda had decided to declare the existence of the diamond mines. To short-circuit the Pakistan government and retain ownership of the diamond wealth, he needs to deal directly with Western countries. He has accepted the offer of a Geneva-based foundation concerned with clean mountain environment. They now plan to merge and create an organization called Clean-Alpes, on the lines of French Doctors etc.. Clean-Alpes will deal with environmental problems from the Alps to the Andes to the Karakorums to the Rockies. It will also group the Khan's liberal and left-wing contacts, and a lot of money.

"*Halqa's* current running finances come from levying a tax on the heroin caravans in the neighboring valleys. Montagnes sans Frontières will also serve as a money laundering operation. The Khan's international influence will allow him to get away with giving the Pakistan government only ten percent royalty of the diamond mines. He will, of course, grant another ten percent to Clean-Alpes. *Halqa* will then expand its operations. It has already compiled a list of all Muslim journalists in Europe, and those who are not Muslim but can be recruited for Islam. *Halqa* will proceed to invest heavily in newspaper and television equity, while placing its own people in key media positions in Europe. In ten years, *Halqa* will control information. But the key to the plan is the Khan himself. If he is taken out, *Halqa* is destroyed, and radical plans set back a couple of decades or even more."

"That was a good summary – a revision, one might

## BLOOD MONEY

say?" Richter remarked.

The five members present exchanged looks and nodded. The professor looked pleased.

"*Eh bien*," de Cambourg started, on cue to push for French command of any eventual operation. "Have you any options to offer?"

Everybody looked expectant, and de Cambourg was pleased. If the professor's plan was bought by the others, it *would* be a French operation.

"The plans for the creation of Clean-Alpes have proceeded faster than we expected. In six month's time, the final papers are due to be signed – not in Geneva, as might have been expected, but in Grenoble!"

"Why Grenoble, *doktor*?" asked Richter with narrowed eyes.

"Because it is neither Switzerland nor Pakistan, and because it offers big-city conveniences without the inconveniences, and it is just over an hour's drive from Geneva."

Agatha's voice was brisk, her eyes businesslike. "The Khan's heavily protected. Have you got a plan?"

In a quiet voice he sketched the outlines of the plan. Then he took out four folders and passed them around. They read the folders in silence, committed the operation to memory, and then ran them through the shredder. Like any other group of academics, they had a pleasant lunch at l'Auberge Rustique. Over a traditional daube de boeuf accompanied by a fine claret, they also had a pleasant chat. After lunch, they settled back into the meeting room. Suddenly serious, the first item on the agenda was the professor's plan. It



## AZAM GILL

was unanimously approved. He would oversee it, but Agatha would be the field controller.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Half the size of Massachusetts, and with a population of 35,000, the state of Gunda has remained one of the most remote regions of the Indian subcontinent. It inspired James Hilton's concept of *Shangri-La*, in his 1930's best-seller, *The Lost Horizon*, as well as Kipling's *The Man Who Would be King*. In the North of Pakistan – formerly the North-West of India – Gunda is a lost realm of glaciers, misty mountain peaks soaring up to 20,000 feet, hanging gardens of apricot, peach, apple, almond and walnut trees. Gurgling streams water the terraced fields of wheat, maize and barley. Cunning subsistence farmers blessed by the altitude and their own determination, produce prize vegetables. Protected by the paternal embrace of the four-mile-high Karakorum Range, the Gunda valley cradles several oases in a high altitude desert. Its renowned peaks are Rakaposhi, Disteghil Sar, Nanga Parbat and K-2, with Khunjerab towering over the 14,928-foot pass of the same name leading into China's Sinkiang province on the North. This part of the old Silk Route, now a metalled road known as the Karakorum Highway, links Sinkiang with Karachi in the South, which sits at the entrance to the Gulf. To the East, then, Gunda is bordered by China, whereas to the West lie the Pamirs

of Afghanistan.

Gunda has access to the Karakorum Highway by sinuous footpaths dizzily winding across treacherous mountain gorges, and two equally hazardous jeepable tracks. The only bridges are Medieval contraptions made of juniper branches held together with yak-wool rope.

The exclusive ethnic group of Gunda is the Tarang, consisting of four clans, all named after founding ancestors whose origins are lost in the mists of antiquity. All speak Tarangi, a language apparently related to no other in the world. The British first explored this area at the end of the 19th century. They were amazed to find people who claimed to be 120 years or even older. Since then, the longevity of the peoples of Gunda and the neighboring states such as Kafiristan, Nagir, Baltistan and Hunza has become legendary, attracting scholars and research scientists from all corners of the globe in an attempt to find the chemical composition that might be the elixir of life.

The people of Gunda have a violent history. Their isolation among high glaciers allowed them to establish the most formidable domain in the Karakorums. Proud and bellicose, they incorrigibly raided caravans between Leh and Yarkand. In the decisive battle of Darra-Dil-dard, in 1891, three Victoria Crosses had to be earned by the British before Gunda would accept a treaty. The treaty fixed Gunda in the Raj's orbit while keeping the British out of Gunda. There was a single resident who oversaw policy. Characteristically, the first resident was a military doctor, loved by the Tarangs and mythified in local legend. He died ministering to his

## BLOOD MONEY

beloved Tarangs. Typically, Colonel Hackworth's body was claimed for burial by the Tarangs as one of their own. The only Christian cross in Gunda is the one carved in granite over Colonel Hackworth's marble grave set in an enclosed garden at the edge of the capital, lovingly maintained by the Tarangs.

These people have been Muslim for only two hundred odd years. They are of the Ismaili sect of Shiites, and followers of the Agha Khan. Conversion to Islam, just like their neighbors and fellow-Ismailis in Hunza, did not dim the Tarang's ardor for producing good white wine, euphemistically called Gunda-water. Tarangs actually claim to have a theological dispensation from their Khan to produce and drink it ... the single cause of their celebrated longevity, according to connoisseurs of the noble brew!

Although the proximity of the Karakorum Highway, completed in 1978, has allowed the Tarangs of Gunda to cease their dependence on barter, they are far from having a market economy. The state remains isolated, except in education. Investment by the ruling family of Gunda and the Agha Khan Foundation has created a socially ambivalent society. Gunda is criss-crossed by a network of coeducational schools, but politically and economically, the Tarangs live in the 10th century. Among other things, no satellite dishes are allowed, although radios are encouraged. After all, the elite assassins of Gunda only operate outside the state. The other source of income is protection tax levied on the heroin caravans. Heroin production within the state is discouraged. As the lowlands of Pakistan have shown, from production and export of heroin to addiction is a

short step. Tourism is also strictly banned, and the Pakistan government, respectful of Gunda's autonomous status, makes no effort to put pressure on Gunda. In fact ISI – Inter-Services-Intelligence – in Islamabad has been cooperating in the running of certain training camps. Keeping Gunda screened from strange eyes is in the mutual interest of the *Halqa* and ISI.

The capital of Gunda is Zehmatabad, at 12,000 feet, with a population of about two thousand. It squats on a plateau with a breathtaking view of the surrounding mountainside. The houses have sloping walls and indented windows, but flat roofs. Each house has a courtyard and garden with at least one tree and a vegetable patch. The main street is metalled, and does not stop outside the town. Like the winding paths leading to a witch's castle, the road snakes five hundred feet up a granite cliff from the top of which the palace of the Khans of Gunda has dominated the surrounding valleys for the 900 years of their unbroken reign.

For nearly as long, the palace of the Khans of Gunda has maintained its grim eyrie. An octagonal building covering a half acre of corridors, reception rooms, bedroom suites, servants' quarters, guards' quarters, hidden alcoves, secret passages and underground tunnels. The palace was built of uncompromising granite, and the roof was sloping. It bristled with antennae, including three satellite dishes. The old battlements and watchtowers were now fitted with sensors, and the highly trained guards of the Tarang tribe were equipped with the latest version of

## BLOOD MONEY

the French 5.56 FAMAS bull-pup rifles with laser sights. They had binoculars for visual surveillance of the countryside, and carried side-arms. Their uniforms were indistinguishable from those of the Pakistan Army; khaki trousers and camouflage smocks, but on their heads they wore the flat-crowned Gunda skull-cap. Their insignia was the snow leopard, a native of Gunda. Their shoulder flashes said 'Gunda' in brass relief over a red background. They were all Tarangs, the oldest hereditary assassins in the world. They were highly and thoroughly trained and were all experienced – in tribal raiding, in raiding heroin caravans dodging taxes, and in carrying out assassinations at the orders of their liege lord.

The Khan of Gunda liked his office. It was modern and spacious, with a window on the South side looking out onto the courtyard surrounding the guard's quarters. The courtyard was also their parade ground, and the flag of Gunda with a snarling snow leopard crouching under a rising sun fluttered from a flagpole.

The study was book-lined, the shelves of carved walnut wood a few centuries old. The desk was walnut inlaid with gold, the top smooth with age and sleek with varnish. To one side of the padded leather chair was a Hewlett Packard multi-media work-station with a high-resolution monitor. The Khan's office floor was carpeted with an Axminster in grey. Rugs a few centuries old, which would have made a Sotheby's auctioneer salivate, were scattered across it. In one corner, on a silk Kashmiri rug, Sohrab, the Khan's pet snow leopard, reclined with feline grace, unaware that his diamond-studded collar could have fed, housed and

clothed half a dozen families in Pakistan. But it had cost the Khan nothing. The diamonds had been mined and polished in Gunda.

*The mines!* He was literally sitting on one of the largest diamond reserves in the world, and the secret passage to the subterranean wealth led from the bedroom his ancestors had slept in for nearly a millennium.

The word Khan in Central and South Asia indicates a chief or ruler, and is a title and not a family name. His name was Mohammed Kamal Khan. Kamal means wonder, so his name meant he was Mohammed, the Wonderful Chief. His only titles were Khan of Gunda and Khan of the Tarangs. He needed no other. He was a direct descendant of the founder of the Tarang tribe, a known Shaman whose powers were hereditary. When the Tarangs converted to Islam, the Shaman chiefs became *pirs* – Muslim holy men or saints peculiar to South Asia. Their followers attribute them with intercessionary and miraculous powers believed to be hereditary. Mohammed Kamal Khan made the most of his position as *pir*.

Like the other Tarangs, he had fair skin, a wide forehead, sloping eyes and flat facial planes with high cheek bones. His nose was high-bridged with flaring nostrils, and the hooded eyes made him look half-asleep. He had one of the most alert brains in all Islam. He sat at his desk in the *shalwar-kameez* of the Tarangs – loose billowing baggy trousers and a shirt reaching to his knees. His *shalwar-kameez* was not the gray militia of the average Tarang, but the creamy bosky silk with the two-horses stamp brought from

## BLOOD MONEY

China across the Khunjerab pass.

Sohrab, the snow leopard, cocked his head, his muscles taut. That meant somebody in the corridor outside Kamal Khan's study. Sohrab could hear footsteps twenty paces away on a padded carpet, which a human ear could not detect. Hunting alone, Sohrab could bring down prey four times his own weight.

The visitor was Rehana, the Rani, the Khan's wife, a princess from a neighboring state, of a family linked by marriage to the eminent Agha Khan himself. Rehana had been educated by a French governess in her father's palace, and subsequently by the nuns of the Sacred Heart at their Convent School in Rawalpindi, after which she had gone to a finishing school in Lahore. She had also taken a summer course at the Sorbonne. She entered with a slight knock, and recognizing her, Sohrab relaxed. Deep down, Rehana always felt fear in Sohrab's presence, but her smile concealed it. Her family line was older than the Khan's.

The Khan smiled back, and they exchanged muted *salaams*.

There were no kisses. Both respected the taboos of their Islamic clan. Rehana put the silver tray on the polished desk. As his wife, she herself brought him his ten o'clock tea and two samosas with fiery hot chutney, although the cooking was done in the royal kitchens. She poured two cups of tea from the silver teapot with the Gunda crest of a snarling snow leopard crouching under a rising sun. The cups were Royal Doulton. She was a voluptuous woman, this fifth cousin of his, and he appreciated the luxurious thighs and the swish of



her gold satin shalwar as she crossed her legs and settled down with the cup of tea.

“How’s Rustam?” he inquired.

“Your son is with his tutor. Working at his math. Did you want him?”

Rehana’s ability to divine her husband’s wishes and realize them pleased the Khan.

“I was thinking of visiting the Farm.”

A slight shadow swiftly crossed Rehana’s regal face. The Farm was an experimental station in modern intensive farming at high altitudes, in part unwittingly financed by the Agha Khan Foundation. The rest of the money came from Gunda State, especially the payment for the PD-Evian franchise. The Planning and Development department – PD – had collaborated in a joint venture with Canada’s Evian, a chain of poultry farms, to introduce modern poultry farming for small farmers in Pakistan. Most of the breeding stations were staffed by ex-servicemen. The Khan of Gunda had bought a PD-Evian franchise shortly after the Soviets entered Afghanistan. It was declared an experimental research station to study the effects of high-altitude herbs on longevity, with a view to commercializing them at some time. The staff was a mixture of European and Pakistani, including Tarangs. As the contracts of the Europeans expired, the Westerners were replaced by Pakistani staff, who had one thing in common; they were all ex-servicemen of the Pakistan Army, and most of them had served in the SSG – Special Services Group. They had all experienced combat and clandestine operations, and trained Sikh and Kashmiri separatists and Afghan Mujahideen. As soon as the US

## BLOOD MONEY

Congress approved aid for the Afghan Mujahideen, and the Reagan administration rallied Islamic support behind them, the Gunda Farm realized the first part of its objective. Maintaining two Tarang agro-scientists to publish the odd report for UNESCO, the Evian farm offered highly refined finishing courses to the Mujahideen. CIA staff was excluded on the grounds of Gunda's autonomy. Things were going so well for the CIA that they accepted the taboo. Eventually, the second half of the *Halqa's* objective was realized when selected members of Islamic countries huddling under the anti-Soviet umbrella, started enrolling. The Farm had become the elite finishing school for Islamic radicals. Unknown to the *Halqa*, however, the Farm had been under satellite surveillance three months before President George Bush Senior's abortive decision to place Pakistan on the list of terrorist states.

The Rani hated terrorist methods, although she detested the West with as much passion as anybody else. Had not the West stolen Islam's destiny to create a better world? But then, would the *Halqa* restore her son's birthright to be a part of an Islamic empire leading the world? She very much doubted it, and her heart was saddened that, at the age of seven, her son was being initiated into her husband's world of dappled intrigue.

"I'll send him to you," she replied with a smile.

The Khan was always indulgently amused at the conflict between Rehana's royal and wifely duties and her maternal instinct. He couldn't afford to indulge in such weakness. He had a responsibility to bring up his son and make him fit to rule Gunda and serve Islam.

The Khan shifted a file on his desk, then looked up and gave the Rani a whimsical smile.

“Would you like to go to Europe?”

Her heart sang. *Shopping, theatres, restaurants, and she could wear jeans!* They had spent their enchanted honeymoon in Paris.

“Yes,” she replied, her big black eyes live with excitement. “Where – Paris?”

Kamal Khan nodded indulgently, noting with interest her gently heaving bosom.

“For a couple of days, yes.”

“And then?”

“After that there’s a conference in Grenoble. We’re going to join Clean-Alpes. It will allow us to enter Western media circles and be in a position to exploit the diamonds.”

Her heart skipped a beat of hope.

“Would that eliminate the need for the *Halqa*?”

He swallowed the last of the samosa, delicious as usual.

“The *Halqa* will never become superfluous, but the *Halqa* will be discreet. The BCCI Bank fiasco should be a lesson to us.”

His face was a mask engraved in rock, and Rehana wondered if she had gone too far. The Khan noticed her unease, and a wave of tenderness engulfed him, which was the closest he could come to the emotion of love in an arranged marriage. He walked around the desk and put his arm around her. She always had to control herself with an effort when he touched her. The Khan didn’t realize that the woman was infatuated with him, that his physical presence inflamed her. She

## BLOOD MONEY

lowered her head near his stomach, when she really wanted to take all his clothes off and have him right there, on the carpet, but that would be most unseemly for a high-born Muslim lady. She wanted to put her arms around him and take him away, far away, from this *Halqa* business. Yet in a perverse way the power of it all enflamed her. Kamal Khan bent down and kissed her on the mouth. She closed her eyes and her lips trembled.

Sohrab stiffened and Kamal Khan moved away from his wife who hated the West but loved peace. Another light knock and Rustam came in. He was only seven, but there was no mistaking his princely air. The flat planes of his face, arrogantly tilted chin and set of his shoulders marked him out as his father's son. The flaring nostrils and black eyes were his mother's. He was dressed in a blue blazer and flannels, with a simple gray tie and Oxfords. The blazer pocket was embroidered with the Gunda crest in gold thread – a snow leopard crouching under a rising sun.

"*Abba hazoor!* Sacred and honorable father," greeted Rustam with the dignity of a visiting prince that always made his mother feel proud. *She* had given birth to this prince of Gunda.

The Khan inspected his son from head to toe. As usual, there was no cause for disapproval.

"Rustam Khan, you want to say hello to Sohrab?"

"Yes, Abba-ji."

The boy was pleased and his face lit up. Sohrab held his head up, with almost a smile, as the lad went and cuddled him. They made purring noises – one human, the other feline. Rustam talked to Sohrab in a

series of unintelligible murmurs. Sohrab's tongue was darkly red in his open mouth.

The Khan continued, with Rehana raptly attentive.

"The merger of our Gunda Foundation with Clean-Alpes will project us onto the international stage with access to contacts we couldn't normally have. It won't be ISI at center stage, it'll be us. Every act of the Pakistan government to seize the diamond mines will be seen as the act of a decrepit country committing genocide against its Himalayan protectorate. I'm already in touch with Wall Street. The same greedy men who threw in their lot with the BCCI Bank and allowed Pakistan to possess a nuclear bomb, will now help us to explode it! They forget that the notorious Black Section of the outlawed Bank of Credit and Commerce International consisted entirely of Gunda assassins.

"The *Halqa* is our only hope to recreate the Caliphate. I have dedicated twenty years to it. I would give my life for it. Maybe I won't see it in my lifetime ... but Rustam?"

He made a graceful gesture at his son who was now sitting astride Sohrab, the only human able to do so.

Rehana's heart had the density of a black hole. Illusion and reality struck against each other. Cosmic sparks flashed in her head lowered in acquiescence to her husband and liege lord. *Ya Allah! Why was I born a woman and a mother on the other side of the world?*

"Rehana, think of Paris. This time it'll be our second honeymoon."

She raised her misty eyes to him. Her black hole heart lay inert in them – a woman being slowly torn

## BLOOD MONEY

apart. The Khan shut the thought out. She hated the West as much as he, and that was their ideological glue. He looked towards his son.

“Come, Rustam.”

Rustam and Sohrab followed the Khan of Gunda out of his study into the corridor lined with hunting and war trophies gained as legitimate booty in caravan raiding by the warriors of Gunda. On a stool at the corner of the corridor, the guard lounged with the lazy indolence of a snow leopard. He was a Tarang, and he saw his liege lord, but the Tarangs bowed and scraped to no man. He was in khaki trousers, camouflage smock and Tarang skull-cap with the snow leopard insignia. He cradled an immaculately maintained Famas like a spare limb. His eighteen-year old face broke into a boyish smile at the sight of his Khan.

“*Salaam aleikum* Khan, and *salaam aleikum* Rustam Khan!” was his only greeting, eyes alert and body relaxed.

“*Wa laikum as salaam*, Ghazanfar Ali,” replied the Khan and his son.

Sohrab breathed on Ghazanfar’s feet, and he felt a stab of fear.

“How’s Khusro, your father?”

“Enjoying his generous pension, Khan.”

Ghazanfar’s father, Khusro, seconded to BCCI’s Black Section, had arranged Benazir Bhutto’s brother’s death in Nice, France. In a later operation, after disposing of a recalcitrant guerrilla leader in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon, he had marched fifteen miles to his pickup with a severed artery in his calf that had handicapped him. He now enjoyed a pension that

would be the envy of any professional soldier. As had generations before him, Khusro's son protected the Khanate of Gunda. Occasional assassination was only an expression of fealty and professional skill.

Kamal Khan, Rustam and Sohrab turned twice in the long corridor, which brought them to the palace museum. It was heavy with the tradition of centuries, some of the trophies grisly. The uniforms of the two British officers killed in the first battle against the Tarangs were proudly displayed with brown bloodstains still on them.

In this place there was no softness and no tomorrow and no yesterday. It was all here and now and the battle cries of Tarangs mingled with the clash of steel and screaming of gutted horses kicking their legs in agony. Rustam shivered and Sohrab's hackles rose. High above the palace, Karakush, the black eagle of the celestial mountains, screamed.

Kamal Khan gently pressed a Gurkha kukri knife displayed on the wall, activating a concealed circuit. Part of the wood-paneled wall silently slid aside, and they stepped into the elevator. It descended at a sickening speed into the bowels of the Khan's palace. There were two young Tarangs guarding the exit. They exchanged greetings, walked down the corridor, and turned right. Kamal Khan opened the door and walked in with Rustam and Sohrab at his heels. They were in a large, well-lit room, which looked similar to a press-center. There were five people in it, including two women. Two of them wore headphones – one for the TV monitor in front of her, and the other for the radio set next to him. The three others were analyzing

## BLOOD MONEY

documents. This was the intellectual core of the *Halqa*, totally unaware that behind their Western wall was one of the world's largest diamond deposits. The news section had a staff of fifteen, doing eight-hour shifts in teams of five. Mostly Pakistani, the News Section of Gunda had Indonesians, Malaysians, Arabs and Africans. They had certain things in common. They had all been to English or French public schools, American, English or French universities, hated the West, and believed in the *Halqa*. Their analytical abilities were the envy of the CIA director. They were the overt News Section of the Gunda Foundation – in a remote mountain fastness. They did no spying – they didn't need to, with the volume of information emitted by the news networks. The News Section collected, sifted, compared omissions and commissions, analyzed when necessary and planned an operation executed by the more energetic members of the *Halqa*.

The *Halqa* did not make policy, and it did not execute it either. It oversaw the smooth running of the continuity of policy, which was to recreate a federating Caliphate to reflect their vision of a better world. From time to time the *Halqa* selected a target and chose the radical organization to destroy it. For most of the time they warned an organization of a possible duplication of effort. The News Section was known to Western intelligence agencies, and the *Halqa* knew it. It made no difference.

Salamat Ali, an owlish Egyptian nerd with a bald pate, rose to greet the Khan. They embraced and kissed, and Salamat Ali kissed Rustam, fearfully since Sohrab was nearby. Salamat Ali had masterminded the



ambush of the UN's Pakistani detachment in Somalia in June 1993, which left eighteen dead. In reprisals, the enraged Pakistanis had killed over fifty Somalis. The *Halqa* had sacrificed eighteen Pakistanis to divert Western attention from the decades of close military cooperation between Somalia and Pakistan, especially for Farah Aidid. The Americans' failed attack on Aidid's headquarters followed by their withdrawal had been a *Halqa* success.

Bushra Butt took off her headphones to kiss Rustam. She was young and vivacious, her uncle a leader of one of the Kashmiri terrorist groups. With delicate skill, her razor-sharp brain had come up with a plan implemented by the Sudanese. John Garang, the leader of the Christian rebels in the Sudan, had been duped into accepting aid, which in reality came from communist sources. UN ambassadors of Islamic countries were recruited in the effort to isolate John Garang from Western support. The Sudanese then presented the systematic genocide of over a million Christians on an anti-communist platter.

"Cup of tea, Khan *sahib*?" Bushra charmingly inquired.

"Why not?"

In a few minutes she had an electric kettle bubbling and they crowded around the little table, munching custard cream biscuits and sipping Earl Grey tea. They were friendly and talkative, with the easy camaraderie of a field research group. They discussed the day's most important news. According to a *Halqa* plan, the Algerian fundamentalists had exploded a bomb in Paris. Others would swiftly follow – some abortive.

## BLOOD MONEY

Information would be leaked to the French authorities. Some of it would be false, leading them to make hasty arrests that would never stand up in court. Their future wariness in making arrests would work to the fundamentalists' advantage. Some information would be true, and the bombs would appear to originate from the local immigrant Arab communities. That would ignite the odd racial spark, and combined with the search and detention patrols to prevent bombing as part of a French plan called *Vigipirate*, provoke a period of temporary instability, causing some stocks to fall. The Gunda Foundation would, of course, buy these stocks and resell them later. Thus would Satan pay for their just war. Yes, things were picking up. And it was fine cup of tea in Wedgwood porcelain.

Father and son were in an open jeep, with Kamal Khan at the wheel, and Sohrab at the back. Kamal Khan shifted the gear stick into second before the last bend into the high street of the capital. The powerful engine snorted in protest, then slowed and gave a polite backfire, and the Khan turned into the street. It was lined with shops and houses, lively little streams cut across the roads, and the flat-roofed houses were surrounded by walled gardens of fruit trees and flowers. Yes, *Shangri-La* with Gunda's rosy-cheeked Tarangs. The Khan braked outside the post office and was immediately surrounded by Tarangs of all ages. Sohrab serenely watched them kiss his master's hand, and his son's. He yawned, and a couple of Tarang maidens in their folkloric head-dresses giggled. The women were

Ismaili and Tarang, and there was no question of the chador. Most of them had had at least ten years of schooling. Following the centuries old custom that went back to the time they worshipped their own gods, they kissed their Khan and *pir's* hand. He then raised his hand to his lips.

“Farzand baba, great to see you,” enthused the Khan to a man who looked to be in his late fifties. A leathery face, ramrod straight and gimlet eyed. Farzand was actually a hundred and thirty, nothing unusual for a high-altitude Tarang, not even the chest criss-crossed with bandoliers and the Pakistani manufactured 7.62mm G-3 slung over his right shoulder. His grip was dry and firm, and he also kissed Rustam’s hand. Father and son felt warm and secure. Every house was a fortress, every Tarang their guardian. In practical terms, the palace was ringed with concentric circles of guards – Tarang villages and homesteads. The few paths leading into the kingdom were impregably guarded. According to the latest appreciation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Islamabad, it would take three infantry divisions of the Pakistan Army with close air support to wrench Gunda’s autonomous status – to be replaced by unending and bitter guerrilla war.

They were now on a precipitous jeepable track that hugged the mountainside with a sheer drop of a thousand feet on their right. The gray torrent swirled its diabolical foam, but the three passengers took fierce pleasure in the savagery of their ancestral landscape. Just in front of them a granite shelf loomed. The Khan drove straight at it. On the far side of the mountain a Marco Polo sheep bounded up to the crest. Rustam

## BLOOD MONEY

remained imperturbable. The jeep passed under the overhang with a foot to spare and they were on a track under a granite overhang that formed a natural optical illusion. The track broadened out to a plateau about three hundred yards wide running under the overhang for about a mile. The plateau was dark and pebbly and invisible from the air. The East side was sheer rock.

The earth exploded in front of the jeep and Kamal Khan braked hard, skidding in a quarter-circle. Bits of gravel flew around them, and Sohrab snarled, poised for a killing leap. Five masked figures jumped from dark folds in the rock wall, and held them at gunpoint with 5.56 Famases.

“Stay, Sohrab,” commanded the Khan’s voice with one hand on the steering wheel and the other behind him on the snow leopard’s collar. Rustam held a curved Tarang dagger in his hand. He looked determined and unafraid. One of the attackers moved towards Rustam. Sohrab strained his muscles and Kamal Khan shouted a warning. The trainee stopped in his tracks. Another masked figure jumped on the hood of the jeep, rocking it. He had been clinging unperceived to the underside of the overhang with a set of crampons. His mottled gray dungarees had blended perfectly, and of course the attack team had drawn the target’s attention.

The Khan jumped lightly out of the jeep, Sohrab beside him.

“Mubarak Janjua!” he exclaimed. “You frightened us!”

The camp commandant peeled off the face-mask and grinned, displaying two gold teeth. He was a grizzled warrior in his late fifties. The light of battle

danced behind his black eyes.

“I don’t think anything scares you, or your son, Kamal Khan.”

Rustam sheathed the dagger carried on the belt holding up his gray flannels, and hugged Mubarak Janjua.

“You look well, Rustam Khan. Your mother’s been feeding you up.”

“She tries to spoil him if she’s given a free hand.”

“Khan-ji, your Tarang women are still better than our Punjabi women. With them it’s all ghee and fried cakes for kids!”

Mubarak Janjua turned to face the five trainees. He came to ‘shun’, and his bearing and body position would have put a Sandhurst instructor to shame. His chest came out, neck back, chin tucked. In a single dazzling display his left knee rose and brought the thigh parallel to the earth and then the heel stamped onto the ground with a crack and a spray of grit. He barked “Ho-o-o-SHIAR!”

The five trainees stamped their feet and came to parade ground ‘shun’ with a spray of grit under this overhang of rock which never saw light, only shadows. They kept their face-masks, and at another barked command, did a smart left turn, then trotted off, assault rifles at the high port.

“Stay for lunch, Khan-ji?” asked Mubarak Janjua.

“Yes, thank you,” replied the Khan graciously.

“And if Rustam Khan wants to stay for the afternoon, he could toss a couple of live grenades,” Mubarak suggested with a gentle tilt to his head.

Rustam’s eyes shone, like any seven-year-old’s

## BLOOD MONEY

would if allowed to throw a grenade from time to time. He looked pleadingly at his father.

“It won’t please his tutor, but ...”

“Thank you, abba huzoor.”

“Let’s go,” ordered the Khan with a look at his son, who dutifully got in the back of the jeep with Sohrab while Mubarak Janjua jumped into the seat beside the Khan. Mubarak was Rustam’s hero. He had been in many wars, and had several scars. A living legend in the Pakistan Army Special Services Group, the defeat and surrender of the Pakistan Army in the Bangladesh war had humiliated him. He had seen it as the defeat of an Islamic army, and was ripe for recruitment – first by the BCCI’s Black Section, then by the *Halqa*. He had been advisor to Muslim rebels in Burma and the Philippines, the tab picked up by Libya, and he had orchestrated the Indonesian Army’s massacre of Christians in East Timor.

The Khan braked the jeep two hundred yards ahead, double-parking it against the cliff on the East side. There was a guard house in this place of shadows, and the guard turned out. They were a mixture of nationalities with one common factor – they were all from the Islamic world. They entered the barbed wire compound in front of a cliff face pockmarked with ancient caves, the abode of the Gunda Shamans, now an exclusive terrorist finishing school. The edge of the shelf presented a breathtaking view of the gorge below. Its opposite wall was a geometrical moonscape of sheer rock, starkly terrifying in its intensity, unrelieved by even the slimmest of water courses. The *pir-gah* – place of the shamans. A

place wholly appropriate to primitive rituals of blood-letting.

A slaughtered sheep roasted slowly on a spit – the famous *shinwari tikka* of the Hindu Kush and Karakorums. The smell of juniper wood was released in a wisp of smoke. Twenty trainees and six instructors stood in two ranks behind the slowly turning spit. As the Khan approached his *crème-de-la-crème* of Islamic terrorists, he was pleased. It promised to be a fine afternoon with his holy warriors.

## CHAPTER FIVE

***Marseilles: Hours after the end of Johnny's  
contract with  
First Foreign Regiment – French Foreign Légion***

Nathalie put the car into gear and turned the ignition. The Peugeot 205 purred into life. The headlights filled the filthy little square with an overflowing public bin in one corner. Dazzled by the headlights, the rat scurried off Johnny's shoulder. Flies hovered over his prone form. Nathalie reached over, opened the back door, then slid out of the driver's seat and left the door open. In a few light bounds she stood above the still form. She heard creeping things foraging in the darkness around the pool of light. She shivered, then bent down for a fireman's lift. The stench assailed her nostrils like a violation of womanhood. She bent her right knee, raised his left arm, and then she was up and he was over her back without any risk to his testicles from her shoulder. They had done a good job on her at the commando school in the Pyrenees. In a few steps she was at the car. She angled the back door further open with her left foot. A window banged somewhere. A female voice cried out: "Aiee-ooh! What's going on?"



Nathalie ignored it, bent her knees and slid the body onto the back seat. She locked and shut the door, then got into the driver's seat. Two male voices, footsteps, and she shut her door and put the car in gear. A tough scarred face loomed at her window, a woman screamed somewhere and then she was out of the square and in the little alley on the left and the car engine was screaming in protest. She relieved its pain and slid into second, gunned the engine again and stabilized it in third. She turned in and out of a few alleys, and then the little Peugeot sailed awash in the light of the Canebière. At the Garibaldi roundabout, she did a smart U-turn back towards the Vieux Port. A quick glance at the back of the car assured her that her merchandise was undamaged.

She broke the speed limit by a few kilometers-per-hour and, fifteen minutes later, parked outside the rented beach house, a single-bedroom, furnished, self-catering place that was part of a dozen others running along a magnificent beach. It was a well-kept estate, bordered by flowers and turf, called La Petite Californie.

Leaving Johnny in the car, Nathalie went into the cottage. She checked out the kitchen, bedroom and living room, then double-checked. The place was secure. She pressed the button on her watch that activated an electronic sensor, then went around the place. No bugs. Only then did she make a phone call. Just a few words that were acknowledged with a code-word. She started coffee in the percolator and put a frozen packet of moussaka in the microwave. She took a bowl of cold water and a medical kit and went out.

The other holiday-makers were either out on the

## BLOOD MONEY

town or in their cottages. Fine. She opened the door and took his pulse. Okay. The blood pressure was about a point higher than usual which was understandable in the circumstances. He was breathing now as though in a deep sleep. The bump on the back of his head was nasty, and tender like a plump peach at high season, but it would sort itself out. *Pétard* was a pro. She soaked a compress and put it over the bump. She worked in the shadows but the angles of light thrown out by the other cottages were enough, and besides, the little paths between the cottages were half-heartedly lit by weak bulbs. The shadows of ornamental bushes were everywhere. Their perfume floated on the night air. A car drove up to one of the cottages and she went still. A drunken man staggered out pawing a girl in shorts and a halter. They went into the cottage with obvious intent and Nathalie relaxed. She passed a cold compress over his face. Nice face, strange seeing a man inert like that – a man so strong, a natural and trained warrior. He looked so sweet and helpless. She gently stroked his eyelids with the compress. He groaned and stirred a little and she was relieved.

*Johnny was on the bottom of the ocean and he couldn't move and there was this mermaid that kept kissing him and it was nice. But he'd like to get back to the surface. There were things to do and he couldn't remember what, but they were important. He groaned and tried to get up and the water pressure restrained him, and then the mermaid. She was a pretty blonde but, bloody hell, could a bloke have sex with a mermaid? She was pretty – very pretty, and her hands were soft. And then he slowly swam up to the surface*

*and panicked because decompression was a bitch. It could kill you. The bloody SBS. He hated them, always did things wrong, and he could die. He'd better get rid of the restraints ... he was breathing in gasps and grunts, and weakly trying to get up and probably away from her.*

He got his hands on her arms as she tried to restrain him and, by God, was he strong. The only workable thing would be pressure on the carotid to cut off blood to the brain and render him unconscious. But she couldn't do that to him. At least, not yet. Nathalie ignored the vice-like pressure on her biceps and made soothing noises, and his breathing quickened, and then his head flopped back on the car seat. But his eyes were suddenly clear.

"Who're you – where am I?" he demanded.

"I'm Nathalie and you're with me." She soothed him like she would have a child woken up by disjointed nightmares. "Come on, let's go in."

Johnny sat up, then slid his buttocks towards the open car-door. He sat again at the edge, sweating despite the chill breeze blowing across the Mediterranean. She held out a hand, and he helped himself up. The movement was fast and smooth, but his body was not yet ready for it. The blackness hit him in the face and he abruptly let go of her hand and steadied himself against the car-top. She waited a couple of seconds, then gently slid his arm around her shoulders. Gratefully, he let her lead his staggering legs into the cottage.

The middle-aged company director next door who had been hoping to pick up Nathalie in the next day or

## BLOOD MONEY

so swore to himself. He had seen her sunbathing topless, and had been hoping they could console each other's loneliness this evening. He had laid out a little table with drinks for two, turned the lights off, and decided to wait for her. She had now come home with some drunken traveling salesman. Tomorrow he would pay Madame Claude's exclusive little establishment a visit. *Merde!*

Johnny blinked at the light in the living room. In one corner was a modern Swedish-style dining table in front of a kitchenette. At the other end of the room there was a beige sofa and two armchairs. The floor was tiled, and a simple pine staircase led up to the first floor. Nathalie helped him to the sofa, and he groaned again, but preferred to sit. *Mister tough guy!* She took off his jacket and suddenly he had her arm in a hammer-lock and she was on her knees. If she kept still there would be no pain. He held her right arm in his left hand now, up behind her back. The heel of his right hand was under her chin. He could break her arm or snap her neck or both. He was a Légionnaire; it would probably be both.

Johnny sensed her panic and eased off the right hand but maintained pressure on her right arm, then drew her towards him until he had his left knee just behind her kidney and his right knee just above her vagina, in the crab lock for rapid field interrogation. He saw the terror in her eyes and knew what ever he extracted would be the truth.

"What's your name?"

"Nathalie Le Viallon."

"What d'you do?"

“I’m a researcher at the CNRS.”

“Where d’you live?”

“In Grenoble.”

“What the hell’re you doing here?”

“Am I not allowed a holiday?”

She was getting cheeky, which meant she was getting her nerve back and was about to lie. He gently bumped one knee against her kidney and the other one just above the vagina. The terror returned to her eyes. More pressure and she would only panic and tell him what she thought he wanted to hear.

“What’re you doing here?”

“Trying to help somebody I found lying unconscious next to a public bin with a rat crawling over him. In the brothel area of the Arab quarter.”

So she was getting angry now.

“Where’s my money belt and my watch?”

He turned her face around to peer into her eyes. With a shock she realized that his eyes held no expression – none at all. She shivered.

“I don’t know. I just helped you, brought you here,” she whimpered.

“Why didn’t you take me to a hospital – or call the police?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” she whimpered. “It was such a horrible place, and dark, and there was no phone box. The rats ....”

“Okay, thank you very much. What was a nice girl like you doing in the brothel area? Research into prostitution for the CNRS?”

“I had dinner at a restaurant called Le Piment Doux, and then I just got lost.”

## BLOOD MONEY

She was telling the truth but something elusive tingled in the bottomless recesses of the unconscious, and the steady mantra caned its hypnotic chant into his brain ... *the watch ... the watch... the watch ...*

Very gently, with his middle finger, he tilted her chin towards him and smiled. She saw a bleak soul, stark naked at the edge of the pit, grimacing with bared teeth. Her hackles rose.

“Where’s my watch?”

“*I ... do ... not ... know ...*” She articulated each word carefully, straining at the horizons of reason.

He saw the truth and released her. Still on her knees, she scabbled away, then stood up, rubbing her wrist. He sat despondently, a vacant look on his face.

*It’s the watch and nobody told me – bloody hell!*

“You frightened the hell out of me! I thought you were going to kill me!”

The bleakness surrounding him like a shroud told her he didn’t really care. Without replying to her he grabbed his leather jacket and put it on his lap. From an inside pocket he took out a plastic folder and stared at it. Absently, he whistled *Voila du Boudin* – Here’s The Black Pudding, the Légion’s anthem.

“Do you want to call the police?”

If he said “yes” it was over, but what else could she do? She had to bring him back from where he was since she couldn’t go there to be with him.

“No,” he replied flatly. “*Pas des flics*. This is a private matter.”

Nathalie felt slightly relieved. Maybe she didn’t know everything, but Dufour knew what he was doing. She had to say something; it was the only thing she could

do.

“You’re English, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

Awkward silence. Plastic folder in palm of hand. Eyes less vacant, though. Nathalie sat on the armchair opposite him.

“Your head. I’d like to take a look at it,” she said in English.

The cloud around his pupils cleared a little.

“Your English is very good. Where did you learn it?”

“At school, at the University, and then I was an assistant in England for a year.”

“Where?”

“Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.”

He gave a twisted smile.

“I’m from Bucks. Fancy you having been in Aylesbury for a year.”

Nathalie smiled and he thought to himself what a beautiful woman, and why is my life unraveling again?  
*Fuck the Falklands!*

The demon leapt in his eyes and she felt a stab of fear.

“I was at Aylesbury Grammar School. Was that your old school?”

“No.”

There was a flash inside his head, a thunderbolt of pain. He felt the lump on the back of his head.

“Can I have a look at it?”

“If you want to. It’s just concussion. I don’t feel nauseous or anything. It’s something else – my watch.” He practically blurted out. “It meant a lot to me. It was a gift from someone.”

## BLOOD MONEY

“Oh I see ...” Nathalie was almost contrite.

“It was from someone very special, very close to me.”

“I’m sure,” she smiled brightly, and this time she got a response of sorts. “Would you like a drink?”

“Yeah – I could use one. Have you got any whiskey?”

“Sure.”

She went to the kitchenette and busied herself. He thought she had a very interesting bottom, great potential for all sorts of things. He was being an ungrateful and self-centered swine. He’d better get hold of himself. Getting hold of the mother-fucker who did him out of his money-belt and the watch would come later. This was NOW. *Légionnaire de merde toi!*

“My name’s Johnny. I went to Millfield, one of the medium level public schools.”

She turned around and arched her brows. For the first time he felt the impact of her green eyes. Her upraised chin brought her breasts into focus. His gut felt hollow. They exchanged smiles.

“I’m sorry I frightened you – and hurt you,” he said lamely. “You saved my life and brought me to your home.”

“It’s all right. I’m sorry about all this. I just reacted and now ...” She handed him two healthy fingers of whiskey over an ice-cube. She had one for herself. They clinked glasses and said “cheers!”

Nathalie snuggled herself back into the armchair she had been in. Then on impulse took a cushion off the other one and gently slid it behind Johnny’s head.



He smiled a thanks and took a generous swallow of whiskey. She snuggled back into her armchair.

“Where did *you* learn French?”

“Here, there and everywhere, but basically at school – I was among the last in my class.”

“You’ve got a strong accent – no mistaking where you’re from – and you make awful grammar mistakes, but you’re very confident and fluent.”

“Hardly surprising. I’ve been working in France for some years.”

“Really? What d’you do?”

“Nothing at the moment. ’Til five this evening I was a Brigadier-Chef of the French Foreign Légion.”

Her eyes widened and their full blast reached him again. The mystique of the Légion was a reality in France. There was a *ping!* and Nathalie noticed the controlled flinch of a combatant’s reaction to sudden noise.

“I put a packet of moussaka in the microwave. It’s late and you must be hungry too.”

Instinctively he looked at his left wrist but it was bare. He felt a trifle awkward, although not quite embarrassed for having introduced this gauche reference to his watch. He took another sip of his whiskey.

“All I have left is my discharge papers and British passport. I had thirty-five thousand francs in cash in my money-belt. It’s gone.”

Demons danced their mortal war dance at the glassy edge of his pupils. “I want to find the swine who did me in.”

“You need to rest tonight. Eat, rest, and sunbathe

## BLOOD MONEY

tomorrow. You'll feel better."

As a soldier he understood what she meant. After a lost battle, recoup your losses, get your energy back, then go looking for the enemy again. *Rest is a weapon.*

"That's very nice of you Nathalie – but I haven't got a penny to my name. I can't just sponge off you."

"You have no choice. What else would you do? Go back to the Légion?"

"Not on your life. I'd be the biggest joke there."

Once again the professor's insight did not fail to impress Nathalie.

"What about dinner?"

"I'm famished. Moussaka sounds nice."

"It's only a packet for one serving, but there's more than half a bottle of Côtes du Rhone, Munster cheese and fresh juicy tomatoes. *Ça va?*"

Johnny gave his first real smile, and she was genuinely pleased. His affection for France came up with a rush. She was so eager for the meal – a put-together affair obviously – to be a success, and the French *would* stick to the three course meal. In the Légion the ten or so percent French would take a box of rations and start organizing courses for themselves. The foreigners just slit a *pain* lengthways and emptied every tin into it making a superhero sandwich.

In five minutes she had washed, dried and cut the tomatoes and made vinaigrette sauce. She didn't let him set the table. In two more minutes the table was laid with blue paper napkins inserted with a flourish in the wine glasses, the light dimmed. Light and shadows took over the room. Only the French could take a frozen packet, a few tomatoes, leftover wine and

cheese and turn it into a dappled *soirée*. He thought of his watch and the demon danced again.

The tomatoes were delicious with the delicate vinaigrette. Vinaigrette is made up only of mustard, vinegar and olive oil, officially in equal proportions. In fact, there are as many flavors as there are people making vinaigrette, and this was among the best Johnny had had, and he said as much. Her pleasure sparkled in her eyes, and she poured wine into his glass. No decent Frenchwoman would have thought of serving red wine with salad! They split the moussaka two ways, and it was good.

"I can't help wondering, although it's none of my business ..."

"Go on," he urged.

"Well, why were you carrying thirty-five thousand francs in cash in a money-belt?"

It was a natural question, and her eyes were wide-open and something elusive tingled but he pushed it away.

"For the simple reason that a Légionnaire doesn't have a bank account."

"Where do Légionnaires keep their money?"

"Every month a Légionnaire marches up to his company commander, and gets his pay in cash, which he puts in his white képi. If he wants to keep part of it, he gives it to his platoon commander who puts it in an envelope with his name on it. He can have it whenever he wants to."

"But if a Légionnaire wants to put something aside?"

He snorted.

"Most of them just want to spend it."

## BLOOD MONEY

“On wine, women and song?” she said challengingly.

“On wine and women mostly. But you *can* put money in a savings account with the regiment.”

“Do you get any interest on this money?”

“Some.”

“Why not all seven percent or something?”

“The regiment deducts a bit for managing it all.”

“What?”

His voice was couched in the patience of an adult explaining something to a child.

“Légionnaires are under assumed identities. They can't hold bank accounts. There must be a complicated procedure by which the money of somebody who doesn't exist is legalized and bears interest, and whenever he wants it he can draw it out.”

“With a check?”

“No. He has to ask his company commander.”

“What's your full name?”

“Johnny Kilvington.”

“Is that your real name or your *nom de guerre*?”

“My real name.”

They mopped up the last traces of the moussaka and she brought the cheese out. It smelled strong, but was creamy and had character. He stifled a yawn. They both looked at each other awkwardly.

“I'll take the couch,” he offered.

“I thought you'd say that, but I think you'd be more comfortable in the bed. I'll take the couch. Don't be gallant.”

“I don't know what to say, Nathalie.”

The sun was hot and high in the sky when he woke up. The sea shimmered and the bedroom was warm. He looked at his wrist – and a coven of demons beat a tattoo in his heart. He had a headache, and the bump was still tender. He had no control left over his life. The day before was a wicked whirlpool in his head with no bottom and no redeeming light. That marine commando must have guessed he had a money-belt; nobody else could have done it. Why did he take the watch? The question nagged him with irritating regularity. A Rolex was considered a peach by a teenage hoodlum, but not worth stealing by a pro, which this son of a bitch certainly was.

He should start at Chez Hans. That was a hornet's nest that needed a getaway car and a .357, if not a Sterling. If he pulled off what he planned, it would be a first. If he applied himself with dedication all day, he could convince Nathalie to be the getaway driver, which left the problem of a weapon to mull over. What kind of shit was he in? It was supposed to have been over – all the shadows were supposed to have disappeared yesterday. He'd done his bit, paid for the Falklands, paid for the South England social gentry embarrassment to his family and their sniveling tight-arsed horsey crowd of mean-eyed men and big-boobed women with braying laughs. What should he do – make a reverse charge call and touch dad for a loan? The smooth patronizing voice would in itself be a condemnation, although the money would turn up. His mother would sound pathetic but be deeply hurt. Shi-i-it what a nightmare. He could go back to the Légion and

## BLOOD MONEY

another two years of it, only this time he'd be a living joke and not the Lone Ranger who had respect. Be a hire-and-fire agent for the MOD or the DGSE? They had their own people and any outside help they hired was strictly expendable. Go back to Aylesbury in England and work in an insurance company or a bank where his family could pull a few strings? Go around the pubs telling tall tales of the Légion over pints of fizzy lager until he found the right horsey-face with big boobs and started breeding? His head thudded and his bladder ached.

He was in his Y-fronts and threw the sheet off his naked torso. He wanted to go to the bathroom but wasn't sure he'd not wake Nathalie up. Then he heard the fridge door open and then slam.

"Morning!" he called out. "Are you decent?"

Nathalie's reply gurgled with laughter.

"I'm French!"

At least she was a decent girl and he'd treated her a little shabbily at first but he'd tell her about it one day. He went down the stairs in his underpants and she looked at his lean muscled body with frank appreciation. The lateral scar on his abdomen was prominent and ugly. He was surprised to see her in a jungle-patterned bikini this early. He was even more surprised at her voluptuousness. Like most French women, a balanced diet and exercise kept the cheeks from being full and plump, and slim figures dressed up were sexy, but undressed were downright carnal and Nathalie had one of them. He grinned, eyeing her up and down.

"Decent. Very decent indeed."

“No, very *Frunch*,” she mimicked a French accent and they laughed together for the first time and the sun cast dappled shadows of hibiscus and magnolia around the place, and the wave-tops were silvery against the colored shadow of the Mediterranean in the far distance, and the beach was slowly being invaded by determined holiday-makers tenaciously after their money’s worth.

We could be friends, they both thought.

“I’m really sorry about being rough last night, Nathalie.”

“Men!” she snorted, wrinkling her nose at him. “They’re all brutes. I’ll never forgive you.”

He impulsively bent and kissed her cheek. She was pleased and appreciated the perfect spheres of his buttocks on their way to the bathroom. The world was becoming a bunch of nerds sitting on swivel chairs staring at computer screens and feeling high-tech and powerful but it only sapped their sex drive and flattened the good old arse.

In the loo, Johnny savored the release only appreciated by combat soldiers who have to hang on to their bladders for indeterminate periods of time when necessary.

He washed his face, then decided to have a shower. There were a couple of clean towels that smelt of the sun, and one of those perfumed *savon de marseilles* soaps.

“Can I have a shower, Nathalie?”

“Sure. There’re fresh towels and you can use my soap and shampoo. Mind the bump on the head!”

“Thanks, you’re a brick.”

## BLOOD MONEY

He kept the water warm, not hot. He let it run slowly over his head, felt the rivulets drape over his muscles, felt optimistic that he would get the watch back, even if he had to blow up half of Marseilles.

He felt the lack of a change of shorts, but what the hell, he was alive and not wounded ... and fighting mad. They had coffee and sliced brown bread with butter and blackcurrant jam.

She had cleaned the dishes last night and, without saying a word, he cleared up the table and did the washing up in the small stainless steel sink.

"I'll be off then. If you can lend me fifty francs and give me your address, I'll return the loan as soon as I find a job."

"I don't mind the money, but what exactly do you plan to do?"

"Get my watch back."

His voice was bleak, face without expression. The positive spark of someone who had accomplished one of the most difficult contracts in the world and was now on the threshold of a new life was missing. Only demons to be chased. If he didn't get his watch, what would happen to Johnny Kilvington? Would he have permanently restless eyes playing silly buggers with dancing demons, slaked by the occasional release? And what form would the release take? Why wasn't Dufour here instead of her?

"How – what's your plan?"

"Go to Marseilles, get a gun, put the barrel under Hans' chin and get him to talk. Then take it from there."

"Sounds like the sort of thing that happens in movies. Where're you gonna get a gun from ... for fifty



francs?”

If her remark was designed to embarrass him or make him lose his cool, it did neither. Ice-cold, he explained:

“I know an Arab called Maqsood, nicknamed Relax-Max. He’s an ex-Légionnaire. He’ll rent me a gun, and when I get back from Chez Hans’, I’ll have the money to pay for the rent, or buy the gun if I want to. Do you want to know what happened last night?”

She nodded vigorously, and in sketchy but minute detail he told her. She looked thoughtful.

“I’m not Action Woman, but if something goes wrong in the bar, you’re trapped.”

“What could go wrong?”

“Anything. An armed customer – it’s quite a tough bar, from what you say. A passing police patrol?”

“I should have a getaway car and somebody competent at the wheel, but I’ll have to take the risk. ‘Who Dares Wins’.”

“Is that the Légion motto?”

“No. SAS. British Special Air Service, a euphemism for Special Forces.”

“I know – the Iranian embassy siege and all that!”

“You’re right. The Légion motto is *Honneur et Fidélité*.”

Nathalie arched an eyebrow.

“Don’t tell me you served in the British SAS?”

“I did.”

She whistled.

“Regular mercenary aren’t you?”

“Professional soldier, currently unemployed,” he replied with a seriousness that precluded a witty

## BLOOD MONEY

rejoinder.

“Did the SAS or the Légion teach you to raid the toughest bar in Europe’s toughest city with very tough police patrols and without providing for a getaway?”

“Neither. I haven’t got an option.”

“You *have* got an option.”

She held his eyes steadily.

“Oh no. No thanks. Not you.”

“Really? Of course – I’m a woman, weak, not very muscly.” She raised her chest up and down and, in her jungle bikini, Johnny thought it a very attractive sight. “Obviously not very competent. I saw a man lying half-dead in the brothel area of Marseilles, picked him up – quite heavy you know – and brought him back home, was interrogated, resisted torture and forgave him ... but, of course, I’m not much good for anything else. I might mess up your ... your *mission!*” She spat the last word at him, her sulk in overdrive.

The tingle was scratching at the threshold but he pushed it aside.

“Nathalie, I’m not dragging you into something messy for something very personal.”

Her ripe breasts rose and fell again. The play of muscles across her rounded belly was a sensual ripple.

“Obviously. I’m not one of your muscle-bound mates. Me in danger would never do. I got your life out of danger and now you want to tell me what to do with *my* life.”

His voice battled for patience.

“English people don’t wear their honor on their sleeves like the French, but even the English have a sense of honor. You saved my life, and by way of

saying thanks, I bullied and frightened you. You fed me, put me up for the night – gave up your own bed – and you've just given me breakfast. I can't drag you out into danger for a very personal reason, can I?" He stopped himself adding 'you ninny'.

Her chin jutted and she looked furiously determined.

"There is no need to shout at me." Her accent slipping a little. "I have made my decision. You owe me a favor – you must repay it. And I decide how."

"Why, for God's sake? Why?"

"Because, my dear Johnny Kilvington, when you talk about the watch you have a look I cannot bear. I can see your soul, and I don't want you to spend the rest of your life like that and carry the guilt of having let you."

He put his head in his hands.

"Shut up, shut up," he said wearily and there was no tingle in the pit.

"Maybe I don't want to rescue you a second time. It might not be as successful."

He had won. He had played it the way the SAS instructors said it should be played. The first part of the operation was over. He had snared his volunteer, and exfiltration, reserve, mobility and firebase were taken care of. The second part was the fire and move – *choc et feu* – of a lightning Légion raid. He would find Relax-Max.

Nathalie was relieved. She was genuinely sincere, hadn't overplayed her hand. She was better off not having been briefed about the watch. It allowed her sincerity to be natural, fundamental to a good

## BLOOD MONEY

operation, with simplicity the overriding element.

After breakfast, he allowed himself to reluctantly accept Nathalie's offer of buying him a few cheap clothes. To swimming trunks and a tee-shirt he shyly asked her to add a pair of Y-fronts and a toothbrush. Nathalie felt charmed. He had done the washing-up. In half an hour she returned with two plastic carrier bags. He got into his swimming trunks, and they took a beach umbrella and spent the day lazily sunbathing. The heat and sand had a positive effect on Johnny's inner turbulence and his muscles felt better. From time to time his gut tensed and he flexed and unflexed his hands. Nothing was lost on Nathalie. They went back to the flat for lunch. With the expertise of a woman brought up on a Vercors farm, Nathalie made them a light, fluffy omelet with a salad of chicken livers and lettuce – the famous *salade de foie de volaille*. It was one of Johnny's favorite dishes. A chilled *Rosé de Provence* made it all perfect. Seeing him enjoy the food pleased her. After peach sorbet and coffee, they went back to the beach, now more crowded with afternoon revellers, who were usually the late-nighters. That morning Nathalie and Johnny had chatted lightly but intensely on a wide range of geo-political subjects. Nathalie was amazed at Johnny's breadth of knowledge, and more so at his grasp of issues, although she studiously veered away from the subject of Islamic terrorism. He confessed his subscription to *The Economist* during his Légion contract, and his short-wave Sony, which caught the BBC World Service with remarkable efficiency.

In the afternoon they just lay side by side on the

sand, chatting of this that and everything, idly appreciating each other's bodies, naughtily speculating what it would be like making love, if they ever got that far. By late afternoon they had started to notice the little things about each other. She wondered if the scar on his abdomen was smooth or rough to the touch. He wondered if the tips of her nipples were light or dark pink, if the curve of her neck would be particularly interesting to kiss. She thought he would get very excited if she kissed his nipples. Lying on his stomach on the sand, she saw him squirm his attractively rounded buttocks. She knew he had a hard-on and asked him if he wanted to go back to the flat and get a drink. She found his refusal and discomfiture oddly sweet, decided to get the drinks. When she came back with two ice-cold beers, he was talking to the English blonde with big tits, the one who'd tried to chat him up this morning. She felt a pang of jealousy she knew she had no right to, seeing him wet from the Mediterranean, dripping on the Marseilles sand like an undersea God risen up to mate this blonde Goddess from a foggy island standing topless a little closer to his deep muscled chest than she should have.

"If I'd known we were gonna be a threesome, I'd have brought three beers," she interrupted brightly.

Kathy took the hint. Later, *in the evening*, she promised silently. She smiled back, stretching her boobs up and out. Johnny thought the display magnificent, Nathalie mentally sniffed. "It's all right. Claudio's waiting for me at the *buvette*." She gave Johnny a kiss dangerously near his mouth, brushing the tips of her nipples across his chest. The jut of her

## BLOOD MONEY

departing bottom was downright impudent.

“Claudio’s the fifty-year old Italian sugar-daddy with a floppy beer-gut.” Nathalie interrupted his gaze with her dangerously sweet voice.

“Yes, the one she was playing Frisbee with this morning. He was eyeing you up.”

“I don’t know about that, but she was certainly chatting *you* up.”

“I could do worse than get chatted up. Let’s have a beer.” He was amused and then intrigued by her reaction. This could be useful.

They settled back on their mats. With an impatient gesture she let her breasts tumble free from the bikini top. The nipples were light pink, and his interest lightened her mood.

“Hmm. Not as big as hers!” she remarked fatuously, looking straight ahead at the ocean and the tight-croched beach boys strutting between the topless women and their bleached or burning boyfriends.

“But better. Higher quality. Superb shape and just the right size with pink ...”

“... oh shut up!”

Her mood brightened and they sipped their beers. Then he was suddenly serious, and her breasts receded and the perfect mound of her crotch settled into the background.

“It’s now three. You still serious about being part of the operation?”

“Yes!”

He was surprised at the expression in her eyes. They held neither fear nor excitement. They were like a soldier’s during patrol orders. Good. The tingle arced a

supersonic path across his brain. He ignored it. In five minutes he had briefed her. At the end, he made her repeat it, and surprisingly, she didn't mind. It was almost as though she was used to this kind of thing, but that made no sense. Just a lucky accident that she was this sort of girl. He asked her questions, and she only made one mistake, which was natural. If a soldier didn't make one or two mistakes answering questions he would probably make them during the operation. She had two pertinent questions after that, and then they were both thoughtful for a while.

Maqsood Bougouffa was about five foot nine and at a hundred and seventy pounds, lean and effortlessly fit. In his late twenties, he had a fine nose, small square chin and limpid brown eyes. His forehead was wide and hairline slightly receding, which explained the carefully groomed black curly hair. A paisley silk shirt open to the navel over a pair of stone washed Yves Saint Laurent jeans. Three gold chains adorned his neck, and there were two filigree rings on each hand. He moved with the lithe grace of a caged panther, and his gold bracelet – the Mediterranean *gourmette* – had RELAX-MAX embossed on it. He had the air of a Mediterranean playboy – Italian or Spanish – nurtured with premeditation. In fact Relax-Max was an Algerian Kabyle. The Kabyles are a light-skinned mountain people of European appearance. They fought the French and then joined them to rule the other Berbers of Algeria. His father, a Harki who fought on the French side in the Algerian War, had been repatriated to

## BLOOD MONEY

France and settled with a job. Growing up in a tough Marseilles neighborhood, it had been difficult not to acquire a police record. Relax-Max, as a harki's son, found his natural habitat in the Légion when he enlisted at the age of seventeen with his father's written permission. By the age of twenty-two, he was a veteran of fire-fights in African bush wars, and in another few years it was the Gulf, after which he was bored because he thought he'd seen it all and could work less and make more money in Marseilles and maybe enjoy life a little.

Pimping was lucrative and he would be good at it, but his family would ostracize him. With his savings from the Légion, which wasn't a very large sum, and help from his father, he managed to buy a small bar in the Arab quarter East of the Canebière. For the first year he ran the bar with single-minded dedication, working fourteen hours a day, keeping up Légion and French Special Forces contacts, renewing old friendships in Marseilles, and convincing the police that he ran a straight operation. At the end of the first year, his father took early retirement to help out with his overworked example of a good Kabyle lad. Relax-Max had a little more time. In the Légion, he had been a weapons instructor with the rank of sergeant. He now put his experience and contacts to good use. Old army hands returning from tours abroad, mainly French-speaking Africa, got a free drink, scintillating conversation and lucrative compensation for the odd firearm and gold they managed to slip across on military flights. These weapons were 'clean' and untraceable, and of value to the *Unione Corse*. Relax-



Max was the official armorer of the Corsican Mafia, and in between, rented out a 'clean' weapon for a one-time job with the understanding that he personally disposed of it. Relax-Max was very proud of his entrepreneurial status, and his family prouder still. Of late, his mother had been scouring Marseilles for a strong child-bearing Kabyle girl who could give her a few grandsons. She could then sit fully dressed on the beach with the other Arab ladies and watch the grandsons toddle bare-bottomed over the sand.

Relax-Max expertly parked his suped-up Renault Clio between a Citroen and a Volkswagen, and sinuously got out of the car, winking cheekily at a leggy French housewife loaded with shopping bags. She gasped and he smiled a charming smile, looked at his reflection in a shop-window, and entered Ali's fruit-shop with a cheerful '*Saheer*', the North African "hi" preferred to "Salaam" which is not at all cool. He shook hands and exchanged a few pleasantries with Ali, the grocer, and then went out into the teeming mass of Arab humanity overpopulating the Arab quarter to the frightened resentment of the French.

He entered his bar sideways – a good Légion habit, of always presenting the narrowest possible target. His face broke into a smile and he went straight to the corner table, ignoring his father behind the bar.

"Johnny – what the hell d'you want? You looking for a fight?" His smile was genuine, but the eyes were wary.

"No Max. You know I'm a man of peace."

They exchanged winks.

"You got yourself a nice fiancée. You are Engleesh

## BLOOD MONEY

pretty lady?”

Nathalie was unable to escape his charm. Not many people could, to the retrospective regret of some.

“*Ben je suis bien Française!*” Nathalie declared, then added for good measure for goldilocks of the boobs that afternoon: “And I’m not his fiancée. We’re friends.”

“Ah Johnny, that’s tempting. You’re getting slow.”

“Shut up” and they exchanged winks again.

“Excuse me,” said Relax-Max and went to the bar, said hello to his father, then to the two young *Beurs*, as the French-born Arabs choose to call themselves. They were both drug peddlers, tough and well-dressed, having their pre-business beer at seven in the evening before their customers hit the streets. The bar was small, with about seven tables and a chrome bar-top. The decor was Fifties American – James Dean and Elvis Presley. The music was North African rai from hi-fidelity speakers hung between the Beatles and Elvis Presley mirrors.

He came back with three more beers. Nathalie and Johnny had already finished the ones they had ordered. The old harki’s antennae had prickled as soon as they had come in and ordered their beers. He knew they had come to see his son, and there could only be one reason, although they didn’t look the type. But then, who did? *Allah Akbar!*

They clinked glasses and said “*tchin-tchin*,” Relax-Max’s rings making little sequins dance in the diffused light of the bar.

After the harmless ritual flirtation with a Légionnaire’s female companion, Relax-Max got down to swapping stories, and they moved onto the subject

of Rwanda, where Johnny had been attached to a French marine commando regiment as advisor. Relax-Max was interested.

“It was a bit of a bitch – *putain de bordel*. Africans running all over the landscape discharging their Kalashnikovs at anything in sight. No time to tell a Tutsi from a Hutu. Drive madly all over the country and smile and wave and make sure they saw all your heavy weapons and were suitably impressed.”

Nathalie was listening intently.

“Any combat?” Relax-Max asked, looking innocently into his beer.

“A few commando actions, but they’re unofficial. I took a party of French regular army *schalabos* and snuffed out a militia headquarters.”

“Noisy?” gently inquired Relax-Max, pursing his lips.

“No. Panther-walk and cold-steel, but messy.”

“Normal,” concurred Relax-Max. “You’re still around, and here to split a beer. What can I do for you, *mon copain*?” Nobody ever came to see Relax-Max for nothing these days.

“I need a hand-gun.”

Relax-Max gave him a level look. “Do I know what it’s for?”

“No. But maybe you will, tomorrow.”

“And it won’t be you that tells me, *hein mon pote*?” He pursed his lips and his nostrils flared, bunching up the flesh of his cheeks. His body rippled in the almost effeminate expression of the North African macho. His eyes had the look of a desert falcon sighting dinner. Nathalie felt she was peripheral to the ritual of two warriors interacting, yet felt privileged to observe it.

## BLOOD MONEY

Johnny's voice slipped into a cool, low-profile drawl. "It's not a business hit. It's personal. *On m'a couillonné* – my balls got crushed."

"*Merde.*" Relax-Max noted the bleak look in the ice-cold eyes. "When?"

"Last night. After I finished my contract."

"They took everything, did they?"

"It was a *coup* from the back."

"*D'accord, mon vieux.* This is a *magouille* I haven't heard about. And Relax-Max the Kabyle hears everything. You can have a *cadeau* – a gift to get your honor back."

Johnny was wary. The Kabyle's 'gifts' were well known.

"That's very generous of you."

Relax-Max nodded regally, approving of Johnny's good manners and patience. "For you, there's no rent. But I'll give you a payable-when-able of a thousand francs on a clean 9mm Beretta."

"How clean?"

"Hand-made copy in Lebanon's Bekaa valley. Test-fired by me. No record of the piece in France. Ten percent annual interest on the thousand francs. Interest-free for the first year."

Johnny whistled inwardly. The Kabyle was being generous.

"*Legio Patria Nostra.*"

"*Legio Patria Nostra.*"

They shook hands on the ritual affirmation that the Légion was their home and country. Nathalie felt the sincerity of their belief.

"And for good measure, I'll throw in a flick-knife."

Relax-Max flashed a brilliant grin.

Nathalie expertly parked the 205 in the twilight. It was only a stone's throw from Chez Hans. She pressed Johnny's hand. She had never seen a man look so determined.

Johnny walked past the bar casually. It was early. There were no customers. He turned back and walked in. Hans was busy polishing glasses behind the counter. Johnny walked up to the bar with a big grin.

"Hello Hans," he cried out cheerfully.

Even before Hans had time to reply, Johnny had the barrel of the Beretta wedged firmly under Hans' chin.

"Hands on the bar, Hans."

Hans' eyes bulged in terror and he did as he was told. He tried to speak but the gun-barrel was pressed too tight into his throat. Johnny eased the pressure a little.

"Talk, you fuckin' Nazi. Did you know the bloke I drank with last night?"

"I was never a Nazi."

Johnny looked up towards the Nazi paraphernalia behind the bar, competing for space with Légion bric à brac.

"No, that's business."

Johnny twisted Hans' ear, then cupped his hand and delivered a medium-strength blow to the eardrum. A little more and it would have burst the drum and deafened him. Hans nearly fainted.

"I'll snip your dick off," Johnny snarled.

"Last week ..." Hans gasped.

## BLOOD MONEY

“What?”

“Last week I had a heart attack. I think I’m having one now.”

“Who was the guy, you motherfucker?” Johnny demanded harshly, his voice pitiless.

“He, he ...” and suddenly the old man’s voice grew ragged and Johnny had to hold his full weight. He leaned over, eased him down behind the bar. In a lithe movement he vaulted over. The old man was gasping, eyes beginning to show their whites. *Sod you. Don’t you dare die on me you old fart*, he prayed as he desperately tried heart massage. There was a rattling noise and the old man went still. Johnny had seen enough dead men. No paramedic was gonna save Hans now.

He took the towel, wiped the bar counter where he had placed his hands to vault over. The cash box was open. He helped himself to a few hundred franc notes. The bar was still empty. He counted to ten. His breathing returned to normal. Nobody in the street outside. Using the towel, he dialed 17, the emergency police number. He spoke tensely. Then he walked out of the bar, slowly, casually, like any other customer. From the flat across the road, the highly efficient, hand-held Sony video camera expertly recorded his exit, as it had his entry into the bar.

There was no one in the street outside. He slipped into the seat beside Nathalie. Without a word she put the little car into gear. Only on the main road did she glance at him, and what she saw frightened her. Not

the stamp of violence, but the sheer emptiness. An inner emptiness of the bottomless pit.

She drove on for a little while before asking: "Did you get the information?"

"No. He had a heart attack."

There was a solid blow to the pit of her stomach. "He must have been very frightened."

"I didn't kill him – I wanted him alive. He was seventy-six. He had a heart attack last week."

'Manslaughter', she said to herself. Aloud: "I'm sorry."

"For me?"

She was but she didn't dare say yes. "No, for the whole mess."

"You can drop me off anytime you like."

"Not really. Not yet, Johnny."

"Why not? I'm not an alley cat you found in a back street."

"No? Anyway, I want to know what makes you tick."

"Don't say that again – please don't." His voice was dangerously calm.

They drove in silence.

Johnny sat on the sofa, staring out at the sea.

"I'd like to ask you something."

He stared at her in silence. Just a blank look.

"Why were you headed for Grenoble?"

"Good town. I'd been there before. My seniors in the Légion suggested it as a good place to settle in. All the advantages of a big town. None of the disadvantages that usually come with it. It seems pointless now."

## BLOOD MONEY

“I have a suggestion.”

He gave her another blank look.

“Come with me to Grenoble. You were headed there anyway. I have a flat with a sofa-bed. I have friends. I’ll help you find a job.”

“Why?”

“Because you need one,” she smiled.

“When do we leave?”

“Tomorrow morning.”

“I’ll take you out to dinner.” Then he added in response to her surprised look: “I helped myself to a few hundred francs from the cash register.”

‘*Légionnaire*’, she said to herself, stifling the urge to smile and make a witty remark.

“I didn’t clean it out. I also rang SAMU – the paramedics.”

“Wasn’t it a little late?”

“Yes, but if someone saw me in the street and identified me later, I could be accused of not helping a person in danger which is a crime in France.”

Nathalie appreciated his coolness and the professor’s ability to interpret a dossier. SAS and Légion – some combination.

“I have another suggestion.”

“Yeah?”

“I’ll go to the reception office, settle my bill. Then I’ll bring some prime steak and do you dinner. Meanwhile, you have a nice hot bath.”

“You ashamed of being seen out with me?”

“Look, you’re a tough guy, but you’re not in the right frame of mind to wine and dine a girl. Later, in Grenoble.”



## AZAM GILL

His lips curled, but he agreed. She was right.

The bath did do him a lot of good but nothing would ever fill the hole in his heart. She peeped into the bath and ogled his chest, sparsely covered with suds.

After the superb dinner they walked along the beach in the cool air. The gentle whoosh of waves was calming. She talked to him about Grenoble and job possibilities. He thought of the old *Légionnaires'* association – the *amicale* that would surely help him. He also thought of other things, and saw the ghosts of the Falklands rise from the waves, then rise again.

The cries of terror made her bolt out of bed, naked and still asleep. They were coming from upstairs. She ran up two steps at a time. He was tossing under the sheet, screaming and cursing incoherently in English. She knelt by the bed and gently stroked his cheek. It was sweaty and she blew on it softly, then covered it with little kisses. He calmed down, and his breathing returned to normal. He suddenly opened his eyes wide, then sat up. He was wearing nothing.

“I was having a nightmare. I haven’t had it for four years and now it’s back again.”

“Shhhh. I’ll get you a drink.” She suddenly realized she wasn’t wearing anything. She went down the stairs, her bottom cross at itself for having been seen bare.

When she came back up she was in her bathrobe.

Johnny drank the water gratefully. She sat on the bed.

“Is it a childhood nightmare?”

“No, worse than that. I was in the Falklands.

## BLOOD MONEY

Something that should never have happened, happened.”

His eyes seemed to gaze a hundred miles beyond her own as he went on: “I did my A-levels at Millfield, a public school. I was accepted at Sandhurst, the British Military Academy. Passed out second in my class, served two years with the Green Jackets. Accepted for SAS training. Just after my first year in the SAS, the Argies occupied the Falklands. I was part of the special operation designed to outflank them. There was a massive cock-up in communications. We were landed in very low visibility on an iceberg. A figure came at me. I fired.”

His voice struggled to keep control, then won. He carried on.

“It was one of us – one of us!” His fist pounded the mattress and Nathalie wanted to squeeze his shoulder but couldn’t. “The mess was made by General Headquarters. They had sent an SBS Patrol to the same iceberg. Neither team had been informed of the other because the ninny of a staff officer gave both patrols the same grid reference.

“The SBS is Special Boat Squadron – Royal Marine Commandos. Peter Benchley ... bloke I shot ... best friend. Room-mates at Millfield, course-mates at Sandhurst ... held him in my arms ... gale-force wind whistling around us ... bloody iceberg ... life ebbed out of him. Before dying gave me his watch. Shit! That bastard in the alley took away Pete’s forgiveness.”

Understanding came to Nathalie in a rush. For a millisecond Johnny’s shoulder’s slumped. Then he took

up the narrative again.

“Pete’s sergeant-major went into a blind fury. He jumped me on the spot, and would have killed me. He got his knife out after hurling snow in my eyes.

“In the court of inquiry following the war, he was recommended for a Field General Court Martial, which gave him a dishonorable discharge. He swore to get me for that. His name’s Roger Martin.”

“What about the ninny staff officer who caused the cock-up?”

“There was no written record of the order transmitted. He claimed I’d fucked up, and Roger Martin believed it. In fact, a lot of the SBS believe it was an SAS drama, and I am personally to blame.

“I was forced to resign my commission, and joined the French Foreign Légion. After the first year, I stopped having nightmares of Peter’s death. It’s started again now.”

“Is it because you were so busy in the Légion?”

He gave her a twisted sort of vaguely superior smile. It was because the watch had gone.

But he said: “Armies are about family and families are about love. A regiment is like a family because there’s love. In a family, brothers and sisters aren’t often each other’s friends. You like some, you dislike others, some you outright hate. But the same sense of love and duty that makes a family stick together makes a regiment stick together.”

“We civilians tend to think that armies are horribly brutal places where you just obey orders.”

“The operative word is ‘just.’ There’s more to it than that. You can force a soldier to kill. You can’t force him

## BLOOD MONEY

to die unless you've read too much Mailer."

"Why Mailer?"

"He idolized the terrified conscript forced to fight by mean-minded NCOs – he himself had served in the Second World War. He was selected over Irwin Shaw and James Jones for the Nobel – as editor of the New Yorker his critical standards and ideology found firmer basis. The Indo-China war involving the French Army and the Vietnam War didn't help anyone who questioned Mailer's militarology.

"Professional units are different. Volunteers in for a career are part of a regimental family. In the Légion, the personal ties are so strong that a platoon and a company is identified by the name of its commander. When the commander changes, the name changes. If you're in Geoffrey Company, you fight for Geoffrey and he looks after you. You are one of his warriors."

"Very feudal"

"Of course it is. Loyalties in feudal societies run deep. Armies run on loyalty and love."

"You need love, Johnny." She looked at him intently.

"Are you offering?"

"Loving. Lots of loving."

She stood up and let the robe slide off her. Then she took the sheet off him. It was hunger at first, downright greed with little finesse. Animal and primitive coupling with grunts and ragged breathing and eventually the release. Then cuddles, sex talk, surprise, discovery and tenderness. After that, exploratory, finding the odd scar and mole, light kisses, and slow, real slow to savor and keep and pat dry the inner tears.

A dove fluttered its wings high on a mountain peak

AZAM GILL

where the sun never set. The sunrays were gold, shot  
with pink shadows. Sleep was blissful.

## CHAPTER SIX

She was anxious about his reaction to the apartment, but she needn't have worried. After five years of a single metal bed in a room with six others snoring and farting at will, this was The Hilton. Johnny said so and she gave him a little kiss which turned into a long kiss. He picked her up and carried her to the bedroom. The large window overlooked the landscaped park and there were people and families strolling around in the afternoon. A little kinky, making love like this knowing there were people around, even if you were sixteen floors above them.

This time it wasn't therapy. He wanted her and she enjoyed being taken, just like that, with no ceremony. On the bed she'd shared with Jean-Jacques and Redford and a few others, Johnny carried her to new heights of ecstasy.

The lurking madness behind his eyes had been replaced with a Byronic restlessness she had found exciting all through the drive from Marseilles to Grenoble. Now his eyes held the cloudiness of lust, matched by the pinpoint of her own green eyes as her naked breasts rose and fell and she arched them to meet his mouth. She moaned with pleasure, put her arms around him and adjusted his crotch to meet hers

in mad pursuit of wild ecstasy. The room transcended time as the mattress moved in the midst of the leaf-fringed wallpaper. Unheard melodies on soft pipes serenaded their breathing passion. They grew sticky, and breathed deeply. Their entwined bodies shared fury and tenderness, panting to a ritual climax. They clung together and her musk pervaded his senses. He shuddered and she breathed deeply, sensuously lost in his mansmell. Their hearts were cloyed and tongues parched. There was a sheen of sweat under her chin. He kissed it. She took his nipple between her teeth and he shivered. Then they lay side by side, breathing calmly, contentedly. Their arms embraced in a disjoined slumber, intoxicated by their own incenses. She stroked his biceps, soft-handed. She propped herself on an elbow, looking deep into his eyes. Yes. The lurking madness was gone. They smiled, and the blue eyes locked into the green and were moored.

The sun setting over the Vercors crest tinted the Alpine sky with hues worthy of Hemingway's prose. The tip of the crest was dark blue, jagged. The clear blue sky was shot with lights of gold, purple and pink. The fiery gold sphere of a setting sun hung suspended, then suddenly dipped behind the escarpment, highlighting the sky with more gold. Nathalie's sixteen-floor apartment offered a panorama of the Vercors sunsets.

They held hands on the sofa and watched the setting sun in silent communion while the stereo played Beethoven's tenth – that which the Japanese call Daiko. It reached its crescendo and the spell was

## BLOOD MONEY

replaced by a long kiss.

“I suppose this is the posh part of Grenoble.”

“Not really. We’re next to a whole neighborhood of HLMs.”

“What’s that?”

“You mean you don’t know what HLMs are?”

“No. I’m a – an ex-Légionnaire. Within the Légion, we get screwed on a forty-minute alert, and every six months or so change location – South America, Africa etc.. We socialize within the Légion, which is a bunch of foreigners. It takes much more than a five-year contract to know how France runs.”

“You’re right – you guys are a micro-culture! HLM means *Habitation Loyer Modéré*, which is subsidized housing – that’s it – like your council housing in Britain; only in France it comes under the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism and not local authorities.”

“So it’s state-controlled.”

“No,” she bridled. “The Ministry delegates authority to each department.”

“Well, whatever the case, they look swish. Is your building an HLM?”

“No,” she smiled. “We’re in a *quartier mixte*. The concept came up in the Sixties. Some of the apartments in the buildings were put up for sale, others for rent, among which some were subsidized. French urban policy aimed to prevent the rise of ghettos. So immigrants from North Africa were mixed with working and middle class French people.”

“Did it help them integrate?”

“Not really.”

She took him out on the balcony. The sky-line was



pitted by high-rises, although not as many as in other metropolises.

“All these high-rises are *quartier mixtes*. Parks, kids’ schools, gyms and libraries are all connected by bridges and walkways – oh yeah, and the Grand Place. Just a huge shopping mall, really. It’s the tram terminus, too.”

“So from here, we could just use this rabbit-warren of bridges and walk over to the Grand Place?”

“Sure. Should be open for the next couple of hours. Would you like to?”

After the graffiti on the walls, occasional stench of urine and litter, surly looking groups of North African toughs, the Grand Place came as a surprise. It reminded Johnny of Milton Keynes, not far from Aylesbury. They put their arms around each other’s waists and strolled among crowds of shoppers and window-shoppers. Johnny found it strangely relaxing. For the first time since leaving Aubagne, he felt free. He had a gorgeous bird, she had a super pad, and he was loafing around like anybody else in jeans and a jacket. Like other French couples, their hands were in each other’s hip pockets, lazily stroking bottoms. Very pleasant, very sexy. He enjoyed the sight of children with their parents although if he had to look after or bring one up he wouldn’t know what to do.

They reached Carrefour and she took him into the hectare of space-age hypermarket.

“Hey! English sandwiches!” he cried impetuously.

A few heads turned, partly amused, partly annoyed.

Nathalie giggled.

“Yes. Carrefour has them flown in from Scotland. A

## BLOOD MONEY

lot of French people, especially women, prefer them to McDonald's or even the traditional three-course lunch. Would you like one?"

"What about having them for dinner?"

Inwardly, Nathalie raised her eyes heaven-wards. Outwardly, she gave him only a bright smile.

"If you want to. And we could get some English beer and I could make some greasy fat chips."

"Yes," he said eagerly.

Nathalie felt a rush of affection for her *petit sauvage*. She had planned to buy some *choucroute*, make *poire belle hélène* for desert, maybe light a candle ... *les anglais* ... maybe with the Chunnel ... the tunnel that snaked under the English Channel and meant that Britain, for the first time in recorded history, was no longer an island state.

After tossing the sandwiches and a six-pack of ale in the trolley, she unobtrusively led him to the men's clothing section. He guessed her intent and protested.

"Look, you're spending enough as it is. Maybe we should keep an account – food, and rent?"

She stifled his weak protest with an index finger over his lips. A retired couple looking for clothes for their first grandchild noticed the gesture and exchanged approving smiles. Youth!

"Yes, but ..."

"Well, I have to confess something," she said, dead serious.

"What?" He squared his shoulders.

*Men!*

"I'm a rabid feminist and I always fantasized having a kept man."

They broke out laughing, and he lifted her up and twirled her around.

She bought him a few pairs of Y-fronts, socks, and a couple of jogging tops.

“You’ll get a job soon. You’ll see.”

“Yeah – as a security guard somewhere,” he said lamely.

“No,” her eyes flashed. “You’re a Sandhurst man, and there are about fifty thousand executives and engineers in Grenoble who’d like to learn English. The place is littered with language schools.”

“I didn’t learn how to teach English at Sandhurst.”

“Yes, but the SAS and the Légion – maybe – taught you insurrection and counter-insurrection. Training local groups and population, raising militia. You had to teach them English quickly and efficiently, didn’t you?”

“Hmm. Actually, I did quite well in the Sultanate of Brunei.”

“That’s what these people are looking for.”

“Still, the language schools might not grant me my experience as an instructor and leader.”

“The language schools!”

She threw back her head and laughed.

“I work at the CNRS and have access to all sorts of information. They hire any – and I mean *any* – anglophone for a pittance, and rent the poor sod out to companies for four times the price as a trained and skilled teacher.”

“Really! Isn’t there some sort of control over these people?”

“To a certain extent, yes. They’re supposed to recruit people with at least A-Levels from high school.”

## BLOOD MONEY

“Okay. So I’ll get into the racket. Better than hanging around a shopping center in a silly blue uniform, or going on the dole.”

“I’ll have a word with my boss. We might be able to fit you into the one or two decent schools around. In the meantime, I’m gonna take you to the employment agency and get you registered for unemployment. You’re not an immigrant, you’re a Légionnaire.”

They had left the shopping center behind them and were on the overpass above the criss-crossing tram-lines.

“Thanks. That would be rather nice of your boss.”

“*Sank you Sank you spik englissh!*”

Three young toughs emerged from the twilight shadows of the covered overpass in front of them. Two were North-African Arabs with frizzy hair, one French with dirty blond hair. They looked thick and scruffy in their earrings and chains and rings and tattoos in leather jackets and scuffed jeans. They also looked street-smart and tough. Johnny didn’t really think so. He ignored the remark and replied with a wink directed at the blond tough. The three of them suddenly stood abreast directly in their path, the two Arabs in flank positions, hands dangerously near jacket pockets which meant flick knives. The atmosphere suddenly grew ugly.

“*Allez, du calme,*” Johnny said levelly, his voice uncompromising. The thugs *were* thick. They missed the determined tone of a fighting man and only seized on the foreign accent.

“*Oh, du calme, enh meester Englissh! Ta guele, connard! Donne les sacs et dégage!*,” which basically

told Johnny to shut his mouth, hand over the bags and fuck off.

Johnny took a step forward, which put Nathalie a little behind him. He put the Carrefour bags on the ground in front of him.

“Okay, *pas de problème*. Take the bags.”

The Arab on the right spat. The gob landed on Johnny’s shoe.

“*Zobi!*” He growled the North-African Arab insult which offers the interlocutor the dubious pleasure of the male sexual organ.

The other Arab tough grinned and leered at Nathalie, undressing her with his eyes.

Johnny stood with his feet planted apart, face expressionless.

The blond in the center felt a mite uneasy. There was something he didn’t like.

“Step back two paces from the bags,” he snarled at Johnny.

Johnny stood transfixed.

“*Allèz,*” urged the Arab on the left flank, in a remark designed to encourage the blond, accompanied by a sneering grin.

The blond flicked his tongue over his lips like a snake’s. He took two steps forward and bent to pick up the bags. His eyes were on Johnny’s hands instead of his eyes, so he didn’t see the kick that caught him under the chin and nearly ripped his head off. Before his body touched the ground, Johnny neatly vaulted over it and turned to put himself behind the Arab who had been on his right. The Arab was still in mid-turn when Johnny pivoted slightly and smashed the sole of

## BLOOD MONEY

his left foot into his tibia. Before the scream could emerge from his open mouth, the heel of Johnny's left foot stamped, ground and twisted the metacarpals of the Arab's foot. He passed out with the pain and Johnny sensed rather than heard the swish of the switchblade behind him. He ducked in a smooth agile movement, and the blade *schii-icked* over his head. He reached back and pulled the third man's feet from under him. In falling, the Arab lost the knife, which Johnny kicked away. He stood over the tough.

*"Allez, debout!"*

The Arab lay still.

*"DEBOUT FILS DE POUFFIASE!"*

Johnny's accent was lost in the parade-ground bark of a Brigadier-chef of the French Foreign Légion reminding his interlocutor that he was the son of a whore.

The tough stood up shakily.

Johnny slapped him twice, on both cheeks. The youth's face shuddered, and yellow fangs bared themselves. Johnny slapped him again, and a trickle of blood dribbled down the unshaven cheek.

"Now listen to me. Tell all your hard friends. I just finished a contract with the Légion. There're at least a hundred and fifty Légion veterans in town. I plan to live in this *quartier*. Next time it won't be bare hands? It'll be machine-guns and grenades. *T'a compris?*"

*"Oui."*

*"Oui quoi?"*

*"Oui monsieur!"*

"Now take your buddies and fuck off out of my sight before I change my mind and chuck you on the live

wires of the tram!”

Johnny picked up his bags, took Nathalie’s hand and walked away without looking back.

In the lift up to the apartment, Nathalie broke the silence between them. She suddenly clung to him and shuddered. He gently stroked her shoulder, his knees a little weak with the onslaught and sudden departure of adrenaline.

In the apartment, he went straight to the drinks cabinet and poured them a couple of whiskeys. Nathalie suddenly grinned.

“That was like in the movies. I had no reaction time at all.”

“Yeah. What would you’ve done?”

Her lips softened in an enigmatic smile.

“I’m a tae kwon do brown belt.”

“Yeah?”

She could see he was only impressed because her accomplishment was in spite of her being a woman, not because of the degree of skill she possessed. She was intrigued.

“What did you use?”

“What a do-gooding judge would have called excessive violence, I suppose.”

Her face clouded.

“What if there’s a police investigation?”

“There’s bound to be one. The second bloke I hit’s gonna be handicapped for life.”

“Does that bother you?”

“Does it bother *you*?” he shot back.

“I hate violence, but there *were* three of them, weren’t there?”

## BLOOD MONEY

When it came down to brass tacks, women showed such plain good old common sense, Johnny thought.

*Pétard's* blue eyes crinkled in satisfaction. The three louts had been well paid for the beating they took. Miloud would be crippled, but that was too bad. He had beaten up old ladies, raped minors and terrified pensioners in the HLM housing blocks. The operation had been cleanly recorded on video from an overlooking office. The Schengen Group had the evidence. Depositions from the toughs would go into a file. A case of grievous bodily harm could always be activated if required. The operation was rolling well. And he would retire next week to his idyllic little cottage on a palm-fronted beach in New Caledonia.

As the tram sped them sedately towards Grenoble center Nathalie gave Johnny a running commentary on the city.

“These buildings on the right and on the left now look a little old. Inside, the fittings are all plush, and they’re practically sound-proof.”

“It seems far superior to council housing in Britain.”

Nathalie tried to hide her pleasure, but it showed.

“This modern building with all the landscaping around it is the Maison de la Culture, where art shows are held. Next to it is the Lycée Notre Dame, an excellent Catholic institution.”

The tram took them along the avenue Berthelot, past smart buildings. People in Grenoble weren't into



closed collars, but most of the ones Johnny saw were smartly dressed. They went past the Municipal Library and Head Post Office, the nearly soundless electric tram setting off a bell at regular intervals. It turned past the county offices in a smooth curve, and stopped at the Place de Verdun. An elegant square with the University Management Institute, Officer's Mess of the Alpine Division and the Prefecture forming three sides of the square which was really a well-tended leafy park with benches to tempt the pensive and those in love.

"This is the Lycée Stendhal, which is an International School. That's the Maison de Tourisme. This is Grenoble's best known fish shop, and on the other side is the covered market."

"Charming part of town we're going through."

They got off at the next stop, just before the Place Grenette. The streets that led off were cobbled, and closed to vehicular traffic. Lined with posh little shops, the general atmosphere was one of relaxed affluence. Everywhere you looked, there were mountains. It was heady. The Place Grenette square was its usual self with cheery café tables set outside, occupied by old people with nostalgic smiles and young people engaged in witty conversation.

"Shall we have a coffee?" he suggested, charmed by the atmosphere.

Nathalie was pleased. Yesterday had ended with an ugly incident. He needed a break. He needed to get back into touch with people. He was one of nature's non-mixers who liked having people around him.

"In a minute. At the Place St André. Trust me."

## BLOOD MONEY

They walked along the cobble-stoned little street called the Grande Rue, past the book shop Arthaud. The shop window displayed water colors by a local artist of Dutch extraction. There was a knife shop further on, and like all old soldiers and fighting men, Johnny was drawn to it like a magnet. Nathalie looked indulgent.

“This lovely little square is the Place St André. The building opposite is the courts – the Palais de la Justice.”

There were the inevitable cafés, and, in the center of the square, the statue of a cavalier on a horse. Around the statue there were little market stalls. The scent of herbs, honey and farm cheeses permeated the air. The fresh fruits and vegetables lent a glossy vibrancy to the square.

“These two cafés are the hangout of some of the protection racketeers. Just the musclemen,” she added, anticipating his question. “The capos and *hommes de respects* either live in exclusive villas in the suburbs, or hang around the pizzerias on the other side of the river. We’ll have coffee at the Café de la Table Ronde.”

“And why’s that special?”

“It was Stendhal’s favourite hangout.”

“Yes, Stendhal – 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote *Le Rouge et le Noir*, French to the core.”

“Yes, and a Grenoblois. Come here.” She pulled his hand and took him to the cavalier’s statue. The plaque read: “*Seigneur Pierre de Terrail de Pontcharra, le Seigneur Bayard, Chevalier sans peur et sans*

*reproche, Connétable de Dauphiné.*”

“It’s a 19<sup>th</sup> century bronze. Fellow by the name of Rag... Ragga...” She giggled. “Raggi! That’s it! In the Second World War, I think June, summer anyway, in 1940, while the Chasseurs Alpains delayed German tanks by forty hours in the battle of Placette Pass only half an hour from here, the Resistance spirited the statue away and hid it.”

“Hmmm. Why the statue in particular?”

“The Germans were ripping up anything of artistic or architectural value and shipping it back to Germany. The local Resistance decided that the statue was a symbol. They put it back up at the end of the war.”

“Where did they hide it?”

“My parents won’t tell a soul – not even within the Resistance.”

Her pride in her family heritage was touching.

“You must know something about it?”

She hesitated. This had to be perfect.

“I sneaked around as a child and found the plan.”

Her expression was that of an adult admitting to having put their finger in the jam jar as a child. Yet Johnny felt the twinge, deep down, gossamer and floating. He was puzzled but didn’t show it.

“You were a naughty child. What if I told your parents?”

“You wouldn’t dare! Actually, it wasn’t hidden far from here. When we go for lunch, I’ll show you the general area.”

Johnny was intrigued and the twinge played a gentle

## BLOOD MONEY

harp, then faded away.

The Café de la Table Ronde was true to its name. The small marble-topped tables were round and crowded next to each other. The usually indifferent waiter recognized Nathalie and gave them attentive service. The coffee was good.

They walked past the park in front of the Musée Stendhal and got to Grenoble's pride and joy – the *téléphérique* bubble-shaped cable cars going up the Bastille. A monastery-turned-museum was perched on the sweep of the mountains across the banks of the Isère. Barely discernible, the glass curve of the university's department of geology maintained its eyrie. A well-kept, tree-lined pavement ran along the river side of the quay opposite. There was almost a mile of pizzerias on the other side of the road. The *honolata socéta* was known to take an interest in the pizzerias. After all, the rue Saint Laurent running behind the road bordering the Isère was the old Sicilian quarter.

Their bubble car took them over the Isère and up the Bastille at a sedate pace, the pulleys rolling smoothly over the cable. The view was magnificent. Ramparts of the old fort, the carefully restored abbey, university halls and tennis courts, and three magnificent meanders of the Isère. A kestrel flew past them and then they were at the top.

They walked up the stone steps of the ramparts and then down again to the old courtyard leading to the Antique Car Museum, but it was shut.

"I'm not really a car freak, Nathalie," Johnny

reassured her disappointed face.

The ramparts are also the premises of the Restaurant du Téléphérique. Entering the restaurant, Johnny looked approvingly at the high beamed ceiling and the baronial aspect of the dining room.

“Should we sit on the patio outside? The view’s lovely!”

“Sure.”

The view from the stone-flagged terrace was superb, and the slight breeze invigorating. They ordered the day’s special which was rabbit terrine, wild boar, cottage cheese and fruit tart.

Holding hands and sipping their pastis, Johnny asked: “Is this where your parents brought Bayard’s statue then?”

“More or less. A whole lot of unmapped underground passages runs under the patio we’re sitting on. Before the war my mother used to work in the kitchens of a regiment that was quartered where the halls now are. She used to explore them, and got to know them very well. There was also a plan to kidnap the local German commander and hold him for ransom in one of these passages,” she added casually.

The twinge was back but dulled by pastis and the view and the moment. It drifted away.

“That would have been some feat.”

“Why? You’re a soldier. What d’you know about kidnapping.”

“Special Forces units are trained in kidnapping operations.”

## BLOOD MONEY

“I suppose you’re right.”

She leaned forward imperceptibly, chin resting on her hand.

“If you had to kidnap someone, how would you go about it?”

They were interrupted by the arrival of the entrée. The terrine wasn’t extraordinary, but it couldn’t be faulted either. Nathalie tasted a bit, and said: “correct.” The carafe of house wine was a robust Côtes du Rhone.

“The most difficult part of a kidnapping operation is the ransom phase.”

“Why?”

“It’s preceded by a death threat.”

“It would have to be, wouldn’t it, to be credible?”

“Yes. And if the ransom is refused, credibility has to be carried to its logical conclusion,” he explained gently.

It took a second for the implication to sink in.

“You mean kill a child?”

The twinge was a pinch. “What *child*?” he looked at her levelly.

Easy! “I mean that’s what they do, don’t they? Kidnap children and ask for ransom? The bandits in Sicily?”

She let him feel the full impact of her eyes.

“Peasants. They’re not elite troops.”

“How would you do it?” she asked again.

“Okay,” he said, folding his vibrating antennae. “The subject is a rich and powerful man prejudicial to the

interests of my employers. He's heavily guarded. Kidnapping his child would serve three purposes: a. Intimidation and blackmail; b. Funding through ransom; c. Isolating the subject through the ransom phase with a view to liquidating him."

"You sound so cold-blooded. That impersonal instructor's voice and the pedantic vocabulary."

"A soldier isn't involved in such an operation for personal reasons. It's his job."

"I didn't quite get the third purpose of your kidnapping operation."

"You want to hit a bloke who's heavily guarded. His kid mightn't be as heavily guarded. Besides, kids go to school and to amusement parks etc.. You snatch the kid and send a ransom note. You specify that the father come with the money, unarmed and alone. Fear for the kid's life will make him do it. When he comes with the money, you get rid of him, and grab the cash."

"What about the kid?"

"That depends if he's become a security risk or not."

"That's disgusting. You mean killing a child is no more than reducing a security risk!"

She was getting under his skin and he didn't want that. He needed her.

"Let's say there was a horrible Mafia chief, here in Grenoble. Someone wanted him taken out and offered you a lot of money. Would you take the contract?"

She was looking at him intently.

Johnny finished his terrine, straightening the knife and fork in the English way. He raised his eyebrows

## BLOOD MONEY

and contemplated his palms, head tilted.

“Only if I was desperate. I’d kidnap the Don’s kid from school or in an amusement park, then stash him where your parents stashed the statue. Conduct the ransom phase using the isolation of the cable cars and make the hit.”

“So you’d need me for an accomplice?”

“The lone operator is pure fiction. Even Frederick Forsyth’s Jackal had to have help.”

“And since Robin Hood, the bugle sounds no more for the mercenary.”

“And the twanging bow no more,” he quoted back to her.

She trilled and he smiled.

“We’ve both read our Keats!” she exclaimed.

“So do you think Robin Hood was a mercenary or are mercenaries Robin Hoods?”

“Robin Hood wasn’t a mercenary. He was an idea. Mercenaries are fighting men, and share something with Robin Hood.”

“That’s a romantic notion.”

“Mercenary. There is death in the sound of it ...”

“... and a glamorous fatality ...”

“... like silver pennons downrushing at sunset ...”

“... or a dying fall of horns along the road to Roncevaux. My Faulkner-quoting Légionnaire!”

She leaned across the table and gave him a long kiss, full on the mouth, and without inhibition.

They were interrupted by the waiter with a steaming dish of wild boar marinated in red wine and simmered



AZAM GILL

in a casserole.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The hill-top patio of the Restaurant de la Téléphérique looks down on Grenoble. South West and half-right, overlooked by the old fort converted to university halls is the Place Dubedout, named after Grenoble's old mayor who died while mountain climbing. From the Place Dubedout, the A-41 motorway leads to Lyon, underneath a beautifully restored old arch known as the Porte de la France. South West is the Paris-style boulevard called Cours Jean Jaurès, with tree-lined side-roads, that eventually leads to the prison in Varces.

Le Petit Paris restaurant is located at the beginning of the Cours Jean Jaurès, almost at the Place Dubedout. Round tables, set well away from each other, expensive crockery and cutlery, real linen and a white-gloved sommelier qualified to give patrons advice on the sumptuous wine list make it one of Grenoble's poshest restaurants. There is also a mezzanine balcony overlooking the main dining hall. Favored customers may be seated and pampered in relative privacy.

Dufour and Nathalie Le Viallon were favored customers. They occupied the round table and leaned back from their feuilleté d'épinards. A little too creamy

this evening, the professor remarked, thinking more of his longevity than the palate. Nathalie was satisfied on both counts. The dynamic young sommelier expertly removed the Rosé d'Anjou and replaced it with a St Emilion '91 with a gracious and well-practiced flourish. With his hand, the professor indicated Nathalie. The sommelier poured the ritual two fingers of red wine. She passed it under her nose, sniffing it with the habitual French delicacy. The sommelier looked appropriately anxious, which was part of the ritual. Nathalie took a mouthful, held it, swirled it gently, then swallowed.

She looked at the sommelier with regal poise. "Ample, with a full bouquet. It has breathed well this evening."

The sommelier gave a knightly incline of his curly head.

*"Merci, madame."*

He poured the rest of the wine and left.

"You're doing well, and the subject seems to be under control."

"So far. But he has a volatile streak in him which is a little frightening."

"You too, my little one, have a volatile streak, but it is charming. You do like him, though, and you are already intimate friends."

Nathalie reddened under the professor's long look.

"You promised my bedroom would never be bugged!"

"And the promise has been kept." Until joining the Schengen group, Dufour, a devout Catholic, had never realized his conscience-less ability to lie fluently.

## BLOOD MONEY

“Holding hands and looking deeply into each other’s eyes is not exactly flirting, and more than just friendship. Ah, youth,” he sighed and twirled his wineglass under the soft lighting from the angled wall-lights.

“Your intimacy,” and then paused to let the full implication sink in, “has not exceeded professional demands, I trust.” His eyes suddenly opened and looked straight at her.

“Your trust is justified.”

He nodded gravely and the blonde waitress appeared with a tray. He was having a ris de veau, or calf sweetbread.

She had ordered an entrecôte grillé maître d’hôtel.

With Gallic seriousness in matters gastronomic, they observed the ritual silence until the first morsel had been cut and approved by their papillary glands. A mutual exchange of silent nods registered their approval with the waitress.

“You’re doing well. You’ve confirmed in principle what our gallant Légion officers find so distasteful. He’s a mercenary.”

“Oh yes. Like all Légionnaires, although it hurts the pride of the Saint Cyr educated officers to admit it. We do hire mercenaries, and until they decide to adopt France as their country, that’s what they are, in spite of low pay and high bonuses.”

“Adequately summed up, my dear Nathalie.” He poured a little more wine into their glasses. “And if we need to twist your gallant Légionnaire’s arm, we now have the evidence on file.”

“That’s good.”

“You will soon have a lover’s argument.”

“Is that what the psychologist says?”

“Yes.”

“May I ask why?”

“Of course you may. After all, we maneuvered him into your private life. You are both living an illusion. What’s going on might never have happened naturally. The light and shadows are being orchestrated. Reality, even if we don’t manipulate its strings, will take its natural course. You are the instrument to break his last illusions. Believe me, he will be a better man for it. He has only faced his own courage and his fears. He hasn’t faced himself.”

“Which is?”

“Which is what we all have. Greed, cowardice, the weaknesses of character divested of a clannish infrastructure to prop them up – the army. Emotional dependence on family, transferred to the military family, then to the girlfriend or wife. The man has moved from one womb into another. He must be ejected from all wombs and relive his birth if he is to be useful to us.”

“And why him?”

“Because he’s the most suitable.”

“Or the most available?”

He smiled inwardly. The psychologist, Joe Rosenberg, was right. She was showing all the right reactions. When the time came, they would both do what had to be done. He prayed they would really be the better for it.

“That too.”

“I hadn’t been briefed about the watch,” she said accusingly.

## BLOOD MONEY

Dufour smiled patiently.

“And you think it betrays a lack of trust, and *mademoiselle* is worried! No. I just didn’t think you were that good an actress.”

She chuckled and they reached the end of their main dishes. It was time for the cheese platter and dessert and the inevitable white Sauterne to accompany it.

Dufour twirled the second button of his jacket. The movement was unobtrusive and Nathalie missed it.

Inside the van parked in a side street two hundred yards from Le Petit Paris, Joe Rosenberg cursed. Agatha chided him.

“Yeah, okay. But I was born in Brooklyn, and only impressed Harvard enough to get my PhD. These academic types. The mike in his button’s perfect. These days they don’t need any tuning. But the old fart thinks he’s gotta twiddle the dials like he’s a Resistance agent on a shitty old radio.”

Dufour’s movement, trying to be helpful, had only caused a rash of static.

Agatha giggled and recrossed her elegant legs. Their elegance was never lost on Joe, ever the connoisseur, but a loyal family man.

“He’s brilliant, though electronics illiterate.”

“You can say that again. If we gave him an insert mike, he’d probably burp it into his soup plate.”

“For one of the most brilliant academic minds in psychology, how come you’re so disgusting?”

Joe grinned widely. He and Agatha were old friends. Since his appointment as the Group’s consulting psychologist, they were also very close professional

associates.

“We’ve confirmed our prognosis,” he said, suddenly the professional. “Their conversation double-checks it. The main subject at this stage of the operation has been videoed and filed. The material may or may not be used. Why don’t we pack up and leave?”

“Because now they’re gonna get into animated social conversation. That could be useful.”

“Yes, you’re right. Only thing is, the French do take their time over a meal. This is gonna last later than midnight.”

“If you hadn’t been in this high-tech van bristling with seven million dollars worth of equipment hidden in its interior, you’d be doing the same thing.”

“You bet.”

The clock by the bed showed a quarter to one in the morning. Johnny was finding it a little difficult to concentrate on Toni Mitchell’s Faulknerian prose in ‘Jazz’. It was late, his eyes were gummy. He yawned and reread the last sentence. That was a bad sign, best way of hating a book. He put it down. He had bought it after lunch when Nathalie told him she had a short dinner appointment with her boss. No jealousy – why the hell – he had only known her for three days. No way. Her boss could help him get a job somewhere. Super. So they went into Arthaud, the bookshop, and he bought ‘Jazz’, which he hadn’t read before. Watched a bit of TV, ate bread and cheese and an apple. No alcohol. The house was silent. Stared out through the windows. Groups of people, some young people,

## BLOOD MONEY

mothers with their babies. Little ants with their little lives crawling over the planet. Read. Prowled around the apartment. Wondered periodically what her boss was like. Probably one of those dynamic types between thirty-five and forty-five. French, posh and ... read again. He'd had enough. He switched the light off. Lay on his back. Thought ... mind went blank. The Falklands. The iceberg and Peter. A wave of madness rushed over him. He'd let himself be shanghaied. Peter's watch! Shit. He rolled over. The shadows covered him. It was okay. Just before he slipped over the precipice, he heard the key turn in the lock.

He was on his feet in a silent, single move. He slid into the shadows of the tiny hall in his briefs. Her face was caught in the semi-circle of light softly illuminating part of the living room. It looked a little puffy, eyes bloodshot. The black skirt neatly outlined her thighs.

Johnny slithered from the shadows to the edge of light. She gasped, hand on her breasts in a very feminine movement.

"You startled me!" she said almost accusingly.

The wine on her breath was a potent force in Johnny's nostrils. Her mouth was a pout – lipstick or swollen lips?

"Did you give him a good time?"

She sat down on the sofa.

"We ate a nice dinner and tied up a few loose ends. Tomorrow's my last day off, and he leaves for Greece the day after. How far did you get with Jazz?"

He leaned against the wall with arms folded across his chest, left calf crossed over the right.

"I'm more than halfway through. I was just about



asleep when you woke me up.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Bet you are.”

She held her head in her hands. Oh no, not this. She fought to stay in control.

“It’s one in the morning, Johnny. I’m tired.”

“You shouldn’t be. You just had a great time with this boss of yours.”

“Johnny, it’s great being with you, but we have no commitments to each other.”

“If you’re trying to insinuate that I’m jealous, please don’t. Jealousy is a negative emotion. It implies that the person feeling jealous lacks inner confidence and the ability to share. If I don’t want to share my woman with some balding old fart, I’m showing her respect.”

“Oh I see. We’ve known each other three days and I’m already your woman! And he isn’t a balding old fart.”

“Yeah? What’s Romeo like?”

“He’s not my Romeo. He’s fifty-five, single, has lots of hair and is one of the most brilliant minds in France.”

“Nothing difficult.”

She had been trying to keep a lid on her temper, but this boiled it over. She picked up a copy of Paris Match and threw it at him. He ducked effortlessly, but his eyes blazed.

“Don’t try that again. Ever,” he said furiously.

She stood up to face him, breasts heaving under the silk top.

“Don’t pull the hurt warrior routine on me, Johnny. Since I got back you’ve been throwing insinuations at me you picked up from some – some garbage heap!”

## BLOOD MONEY

“Picked me up from a garbage heap, didn’t you? You should have left me there!”

“Yes. Maybe I should have. I could also have been charged with being an accessory to manslaughter, only the coroner decided Hans’ heart attack was genuine.”

“Why didn’t you just chuck me?”

“Because I’m stupid.”

His eyes blazed at her in contempt and she let something snap inside her.

“And don’t play the tough guy with me. You forget I’m a brown belt. Yes, I know you could beat me up – I’ve seen you fighting! But I’d hurt you – really hurt you, so don’t even think of trying.”

He smiled condescendingly.

“And I’d fight a woman?”

He looked her up and down. The muscles in her thighs, which were such a pleasure to stroke, fought against the black skirt. Her cheeks had two pink spots and her nipples stood out against the fine material of her top.

“That look is sexist, and insulting. Don’t patronize me like that, don’t you dare!”

“You know what I’m gonna do to you?” he said slowly and evenly.

“No, you tell me what you’re gonna do, Johnny Kilvington, before I really do something.”

“First, I’m gonna put all the lights on. Then I’m gonna take all your clothes off – every stitch of clothing. Enjoy and lust over every inch of your body. Then I’ll go over you with my hands, and then with other things.”

His voice was even but laughter lurked behind his eyes.

“You male chauvinist pig!”

Her eyes spat fire, and she took a half step back to get her balance for a fighting stance. Then she saw the bulge in his briefs and her eyes changed.

They literally tore each other's clothes off. It was like a primitive killing frenzy. Grunts and pants and sticky patches with scratch-bites. They lay spent under the brazen glare of the living room lights 'til three in the morning. They argued and had violent sex. Then they ran out of steam and did the only logical thing. They went to bed and slept.

Nathalie half-opened one eye. The bedside clock showed ten-thirty. The room was in suffused light coming from the sun behind the beige curtains. She moved luxuriously against the sheets. Her crotch and nipples felt a little sore. Her warrior from perfidious Albion. She turned over to rub herself against him. There was only empty space. She was suddenly awake. He'd done a bunk! The wardrobe door was half open and his new jogging tops hung neatly in the space he'd appropriated in the midst of her jumble sale. The key turned in the lock and she sensuously curled up under the sheets. Muted footsteps padding in the kitchen, busy hands. A paper bag rustling, drawers sliding, then a spluttering sound followed by the smell of coffee brewing.

He came in barefoot and bare-chested carrying a tray with her mother's silver coffee service and croissants and brioches in a little silver filigree basket. He put the tray on the bed beside her and they kissed

## BLOOD MONEY

with unintelligible purring sounds softly breathed. He drew the curtains and the sunlight chased the shadows into dark corners. He propped her up with two plump pillows and lightly licked a nipple. She gave a little squeal and her tummy rumbled and they cuddled. He fed bits of croissants into her mouth and licked the crumbs off her bare breasts. She did the same with a brioche and kissed him on the side of the neck. He nearly took off. They had their coffee murmuring sweet nothings and then she jumped out of bed and stretched. Naked, her body taut, she nearly gave him a stroke, then deftly avoided his grab, threw two rapid-fire kicks at his head which he could have blocked if he'd been mentally prepared, and a roundhouse kick which he couldn't have. Despite himself, he was impressed. She was good. She ran to the bathroom where she peeled his jeans off and straddled over him on the nubby bathrug.

They had a shower together and patted each other dry.

“Tell you what. We'll go to the Chartreuse, and if we're not tired on the way back, maybe pop into my parents' for dinner?”

“Great. I know about the Chartreuse order of monks, and the liqueur they make from over seventy-six plants. I'd like to see their monastery.”

“You'll love it,” she promised. “The most meditative spot in France.”

The Chartreuse massif lies to the North-East of

Grenoble.

Known as the Chartreuse desert because it was deserted when St Peter of Chartreuse decided to establish his Cartusian monastic order in the 11th century, it is also known as one of the rainiest parts of France. A range with peaks up to seven thousand feet, dotted with small villages and blessed with broad slopes for skiing, most of it is virgin forest playing host to abundant wildlife.

The monastery is situated at the Southern end. There are two approaches, one by St Laurent du Pont, and the other via the Grésivaudan valley. Both approaches side-step the village of St Pierre de Chartreuse, reputedly inhospitable to visitors in comparison with the neighboring villages. At the foot of the village the Grésivaudan approach turns left, and after less than a mile, soars into the dense Chartreuse forest where even the silence lies impenetrably thick. A mile and a half further, there is a sign indicating the monastery. Turn right, cross an arched bridge over a foamy mountain torrent, loop right, and suddenly the 11th century stone hexagon is there – brooding in its meditative squat.

Emerging from their cars, visitors are known to feel overwhelmed by the sense of piety exuded by the place. Even the rocks and stones admonish you to whisper. It is a Zone of Silence, amidst which thirty-odd monks pray and meditate. They are rarely seen. One English visitor, from the top of the Grand Som, primly claims to have seen in her binoculars the singular vision of a monk sunbathing in a pair of brief swimming trunks.

## BLOOD MONEY

One may walk around the monastery, visit the chapel, museum and gift shop. One may never enter the monastery itself, not even for mass. However, visitors may listen to the mass service every Sunday by putting their ears next to a glass partition. Legend maintains that Cartusian monks forged and blessed the sword of Charlemagne, founder of the Western Empire, or the First Reich. The monks were rumored to have a vast treasure, which caused Teutonic marauders to burn it down in their savagely greedy search for loot. Common sense must have prevailed their Nazi descendants. They left the monks alone.

Nathalie parked the car in the marked-off field. There were visitors, but everybody respected the rule of silence.

Johnny stood outside the car, breathing deeply.

"Let's sit over there," he whispered abruptly, pointing at a bench under the dappled shadow of a walnut tree. The view of the little valley was uninterrupted. A few cows munched grass in a meadow. Johnny breathed deeply, letting the oxygen and whatever else there was in this place go to his head.

She put her hand on his knee and broke the spell. He gave her a vicious look. Was she a witch?

"What's wrong? Don't look at me like that!"

"There's nothing wrong," he snapped back at her in a whisper.

"What have I done? You looked so happy, I wanted to touch you!"

"Do I look happy now?"

"No, you look mean."

"Exactly. Maybe I was thinking of something and

you butted it out of my head.”

“Okay,” she sighed. “I’m sorry for interfering. Can we be friends again?”

He had no choice. And she was his only operational base. He’d better smarten up his act. He kissed her lightly on the lips. They softened and he kissed her again. Not hard to be her friend. He smiled genuinely and she brightened up.

“It’s so beautiful. God’s own valley!”

“Do you believe in God, Johnny?”

“Of course. Like everybody else.”

“Not everybody believes in God. Atheists don’t.”

“They don’t intellectually. But when they hurt, they do. What about you – d’you believe in God?”

“I was Christened, and then confirmed a Catholic. But I’m not a practicing Catholic.”

“Not quite what I meant.”

A visiting priest in Coptic garb passed by them with a benign smile. Johnny exchanged nods. Nathalie looked straight into his eyes and smiled. She was shocked. She recognized the expressionless brown eyes, then the wart on his nose. The same priest to whom she had once delivered a packet for Redford.

“What did you mean?”

“I meant belief in the entity of God as omnipotent – God whose presence pervades.”

“Pervades what?”

“Pervades. Period. Without attributing human dimensions to God. You’re talking about your adherence to church ritual and discipline.”

“Isn’t that what it’s all about?”

They were about to argue again. He took her hand

## BLOOD MONEY

and stood up.

“Okay,” he admitted, pulling her up, “I’m ready to take a look around.”

Holding hands, they followed the ragged stream of visitors beating a ritual path to the chapel and museum.

There were mock monks’ cells on display for tourists. The visitors’ humbled surprise at their starkness amused Johnny. A Légionnaire’s life was no less Spartan. A steel-tube bed, a steel cupboard with kit, and a few personal artifacts in a washbag. Nathalie noticed the sardonic smile.

“In France we often refer to the monastic life of a Légionnaire. Is it true?” Nathalie asked, indicating the cell they were looking at in which a dummy monk kneeled in prayer.

“Yes. Only you could have a beer and nookie!”

She admonished him with a look, but there was amusement behind it.

The gift shop was staffed by three women – one of them middle-aged and the other two young. All three were refreshingly attractive after the fundamental reality of the monastic cells. The buxom girl with freckles and merry eyes gift-wrapped two bottles of Chartreuse liqueur Johnny had bought. He noticed another little bottle that said *Elixir Végétal* and asked her to include it as well. She noticed his accent and boldly tried her English on him.

“Is ver-r-ry strong, this one. Only for when very tired, and then on sugar morsel or how you say it – ‘ot water. Okay?”

“Okay, thank you. Are you a nun?”

She threw back her head and laughed, the nerves in



her milky white throat taut, her farm-fed breasts proud.

“Is my job. I live in village,” and flashed Nathalie’s tightened lips a brilliant smile.

The middle-aged lady, who was a nun, disapproved of Chantal. Another two days and her sister would be back from the hospital and this Chantal could go back to preparing for her A-levels and flirting with the village boys.

Johnny accepted the gift-wrapped liqueur from the grave-faced nun, paying with some of the money he had taken from Chez Hans. He gave Chantal a broad wink before following Nathalie’s disapproving bottom out of the shop.

The air outside the little stone chapel was an invitation to pray. Nathalie sensed the desire in Johnny. Warrior-monk was an oxymoron but that’s what she supposed he was.

“Go in and pray now, if you want to.” Her entire body angled in disapproval.

“What do you mean by ‘now’. After doing what, Nathalie? Letting a village lass smile at me in a convent? Thanks to your little dig, I don’t feel like praying now.”

She gently let her breath out in exasperation.

“Your heart is troubled. Come in and pray with me.”

It was the brown-eyed priest in Coptic garb. He stood framed in the doorway of the chapel. His eyes burned into Johnny’s. Nathalie stood transfixed outside his vision, as though she had neither existence nor meaning for him. Johnny followed the priest into the chapel.

Johnny laid the plastic bag with the Chartreuse at

## BLOOD MONEY

the entrance to one of the back pews and knelt beside the priest. He folded his hands and lowered his head. He could see light behind his eyelids, but very slowly, it dissipated, leaving an infinite darkness of peace in its wake. He stayed thus, with no control over his conscious thought. His heart floated above the unconscious jumble that orbited his mind. He didn't know what it was, but he knew there was no sense of evil.

The priest beside him knew that as well. He knew about a lot of people. He had the gift of clairvoyance, but it was a gift practiced within the church, and under supervision, only when the church felt it would further the interest of Christianity. Charlemagne's sword had been forged in the same belief, and the Schengen Group invoked help on the same basis. Johnny rose and the monk rose with him. The way he was looking into his eyes, Johnny knew he was silently asking him if he wanted to confess. He smiled politely and declined with a shake of his head. The monk had a strange half-smile on his face.

"God be with you always."

"Thank you father."

Nathalie saw Johnny emerging from the chapel after nearly fifteen minutes. She was surprised at the change on his face, nearly frightened. She couldn't describe it, but it wasn't a soldier's hard face. It was like the faces of other people she had seen in time and space just after deep meditation or even a minor spiritual experience. He nearly walked past her, his eyes far away. She felt a pang in the pit of her stomach.

"Johnny," she intruded.

“Yes. Let’s go,” he whispered, taking her hand.

He seemed no longer to share the world they had been a part of. He put his arm around her waist, and it was affectionate, the gesture similar to that made by couples at a railway platform or an airport when only one of them can afford to travel. Her antennae tingled but she returned the gesture.

In total silence they strolled outside the walls of the monastery. They went past the old horse trough. She wanted to point out the superb joining work in the shelter above it, but felt it would be out of place. Then they stood outside the main entrance. The studded oak door was a few centuries old, weathered and hard as steel. A notice reminded them they could go no further. Johnny bowed his head on the priest’s hole in silent meditation. She stood outside his world, tentatively trying to touch its spell, but she lacked the grip.

He turned to look at her. His face was in repose, and good to look at. Things were out of her control, and she didn’t know what was going on, but she knew at that moment the watch held no importance for him. He took her hand again and led her a little way up a path in the woods, sat her on a mossy hump next to a narrow stream of water trickling down the dense green pine forest. He breathed again of the air of Arcadia, perhaps for the last time.

“Nathalie, you’ve been very nice to me.”

“Johnny,” she said fearfully. She was going to lose him – for the Group and for herself and she didn’t know what was worse.

“Our relationship, if it lasts, will always be stormy. Before anything else happens, I want to see my family.

## BLOOD MONEY

I've never wanted to, not much, but I do. And only you can help me."

"How?"

"Money. I need a loan to get back to England. And eventually I'll return what I owe you in board and lodging."

"Will you be back?"

"I don't know, I don't know." And he felt a little sad when he said it.

She put her head on his lap and he stroked her hair.

"Promise something," she murmured.

"What?"

"Tomorrow, I start work. Before going into work, will you let me drop you at the Employment Agency so you can register for unemployment? In case you decide to come back."

It took him a few seconds to absorb the implications of her question. His heart thumped, but then so did the twinge. The spell was slowly peeling away.

"All right, Nathalie. At least if I decide to come back, I won't be a kept man!"

They kissed.

"Maybe we should have an evening to ourselves and leave my parents out of it."

"Yeah, okay."

"At least I'll give them a call." She got up abruptly.

"Were they expecting us?"

"No. But I often ring them at the weekend, and this time I didn't, thinking I'd surprise them. Stay here, I'll be back in a minute."

"Never mind, I'll come with you." Seeing her face, he added: "Not in the phone box, of course."

She looked relieved.

He leaned against a chestnut tree while she inserted the phone card and punched a series of numbers. He couldn't hear what she was saying. But in a few seconds he noticed her dialing another number. Légion was panache and dynamism and Sandhurst and the SAS were methodology and the importance of drills. And the twinge hummed. The dappled shadows under the tree liked his stillness. She came out of the booth and stood in the light, smiling. *What was it?*

"Who else did you ring?"

"What? *Chérie*, we're not starting that bit again – I mean – it was a colleague, for tomorrow."

The cloud spread over them and another layer of the spell floated up to fill it.

"Okay love, I'm sorry."

She reached up to kiss him.

"I'll give you a marvelous evening," her husky whisper promised.

Agatha put the phone down. In response to Joe Rosenberg's raised eyebrows, she re-ran the recording of the message. Joe smiled.

"So he's gonna take his Option Charlie. You ready to activate Response Zulu?"

Agatha was already busy punching in a series of top secret codes into the computer.

Martin Rogers lived in a terraced council house off Cowley Road, in Oxford, England. After his court

## BLOOD MONEY

martial and dishonorable discharge, his SBS mates and officers had helped him find work.

He made a decent living as deputy manager of a fitness club. He had the employees' and members' complete respect, which wasn't hard to achieve for a highly disciplined ex-NCO of the Special Boat Squadron. Martin kept up the lifestyle of a senior NCO in one of Britain's special forces, and regularly attended the veterans' association meetings. He lived with a warm-hearted lass from Yorkshire who was the storekeeper at All Souls College. She was away for a week, visiting her parents in the North. It was Martin's evening off, and he had mowed the handkerchief lawn, then ironed his clothes, and cooked himself a steak with potato cakes, skipping dessert. The dishes were washed, and the house tidy.

He now sat in front of the telly with a pint of Guinness. It was an ordered world, at this time. The telephone squeaked. "Yes?"

"Sergeant-Major Rogers?"

"Ex-Sergeant-Major Rogers." He waited for the American accented male voice to say something.

"Ex-Lootenant Kilvington's finished his contract with the Foreign Légion. He'll be visiting his parents in Halton. He used to visit The Red Lion pub."

"Who are you?" Martin barked parade-ground into the phone. It had already been disconnected. He switched it off, then the telly. His mind was in turmoil. Peace was over. War was in the air. It would have to be planned. Order would prevail over chaos.

He leaned back in the armchair and shut his eyes, breathing deeply. His mind went back to the iceberg,

AZAM GILL

the sleet, the cold, and that single burst fired by that incompetent pup. Blood on the virgin ice, in his brain.

He would take a week of evenings off. Halton was only a thirty-five minute drive. He would wait every evening for Lieutenant Kilvington.

*Wind-snow-sleet-ice-bursts-crackling-radios-years-of-incompetent-officers-only-deserved-to-be-fragged-thebrainlessnottybastards FRAG-THEM!*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Wendover is a sleepy Southern English village, about four miles from Aylesbury, the county seat. Its population of about five thousand occupies a surface area of around four square miles. The skyline is flat, the rolling fields and meadows as picturesque as any in England. The rich green of the Chiltern Hills dominates the vale in which Aylesbury nestles. The railway station and the trains that stop there do not blister the quaintness. By accident or design, they are cute – single-gauge rail tracks with snorting diesel monsters belching smoke. The Wendover station has two platforms – one for departures and another for arrivals. A high ceilinged shelter on a rusting wrought-iron frame, and a tired waiting room. At the ticket window, there is even a middle-aged lady with her hair tied in a bun.

If Johnny felt charmed by his native village, or embarrassed, it didn't show. Holding the brand-new cheap plastic duffel bag in his right hand, he lightly stepped onto the platform. Two adolescents in blazers and ties bound for Harrow were being seen off by a harassed looking mum with a vacant smile and wind-blown hair. The only other passenger getting off was an elderly major type complete with deer-stalker and briar



firmly clenched between his teeth.

He passed through the entrance with a smile and a nod that came back as though he'd never left Britain for five years. How different from London with its crush of cosmopolitan population and depressing tramps and beggars.

Johnny got in the Escort taxi driven by a surly looking Pakistani with a moustache. There was no incentive to converse, and Johnny was struck by the contrast between the taxi-driver and the lithe and carefree Punjabi warriors he had served with in the Légion. His old primary school still looked the same, the high street still had its two sizzling Indian restaurants, the tired fish and chip shop, the Italian restaurant and the Chinese take-aways. The taxi zoomed around the corner past The Red Lion, and Johnny silently promised himself a pint that evening. From two hundred yards, he could see Shepherd's Court, old stables converted into homes around a cobblestone courtyard bordered with roses. The lawn outside was as elegant. Johnny felt the excitement, which brought the taste of stale British Rail pork pies back into his mouth. His mother's cooking would soon take care of that.

He settled the taxi fare without adding a tip, then almost ran through the courtyard to the front door, but his mother had seen him through the kitchen window and her open mouth was almost comical.

"Mum!" was all he managed as she flew at him through the front door and engulfed him into her generous breasts. She kept repeating: "John, John, you're back." She put her hands on his shoulders and

## BLOOD MONEY

held him away.

“You’ve changed, John. You have. You’re home, and in England.”

There was a second, which could have stretched to another, after which the usual awkwardness would have followed quickly.

“I had British Rail pork pies for lunch, mum.”

“Oh dear me! I’ve got left over steak and kidney pie from lunch.” It was his favorite and she enjoyed the smile it brought to his face. “I’ll heat it up for you.”

Inside, the house hadn’t changed. Still full of expensive furniture and art objects, trappings of a successful middle class family. Fireplace, beams and books, family pictures. The four bedrooms upstairs were immaculately tidy. His mother had aged a little, her hips and jowls thicker. She watched him with bated breath as his eyes went over his room. Nothing had been touched. His smelly old teddy was tucked into the bed. They both felt awkward, and this time his mother saved the moment.

“Let’s go down and get you a bite.”

In the spacious kitchen, they sat opposite each other, waiting for his steak and kidney pie to heat up. Her eyes went over his face. Her son had been a hard man when he passed out of Sandhurst, and had hardened even more with the SAS. But this man before her had weathered in a way she would wish on no man. She gave him family news.

“Rachel’s in London. She did her Bachelor of Law degree with first class honors. She’s doing her apprenticeship at the Inns.”

Johnny’s face lightened. “Has she got a boyfriend?”

Allison pointed behind him. Next to his passing-out picture from Sandhurst, Rachel's blonde good looks smiled up at a thin, pale, intense type in glasses. Allison knew what her son was thinking.

"He's very clever. A computer genius, they say," she said almost apologetically.

"I don't doubt that, mum."

"Robert's in the firm with your father. He got married last year. Alexandra, his girlfriend. In fact, they both work with your father in Aylesbury. The new industrial parks and the European Union have brought a lot of business to Aylesbury," she added lamely, praying silently *oh please don't sneer at them just because they're ordinary boring types.*

"Nice to know Robert's married Alexandra."

"We heard nothing from you for five years. We just knew you were in the Légion. Your father tried to ring, but some Frenchman who could hardly speak English denied having anyone of your name. We asked General Hackworth. He said you were probably serving under a cover identity." Her voice swallowed a choke. "Did they change your name?"

He nodded.

She waited.

"It wasn't Beresford, but another English name. Scottish, in fact."

Allison got up and went to the oven. The pie was in fine fettle. She put the plate under John's nose and the aromas of his childhood assailed his senses. The spell started spinning its gossamer web. He dug into it. She watched him with pride.

"Even better than I remember it."

## BLOOD MONEY

Her cheeks flushed. "Here's your tea."

They sat for a while, sipping their tea.

"Joan's married," she said abruptly, then prayed she hadn't put her foot in it.

"She would, wouldn't she. Who to?"

"A captain in the Guards. Family by the name of Dalrymple-Smythe – land in the Cotswolds."

"Better than a lieutenant cashiered from the SAS."

His voice was matter-of-fact and in perfect control of his bitterness, but she was his mother and sensed it. Why did she bring that up so soon?

"I'll ring your dad and tell him the good news," she said firmly, determined to do something right. She ignored the phone in the kitchen and went out to the hall, leaving him by himself. John heard her voice, then she was back.

"He's very excited," Allison said. "But he and Robert have to present a financial report to a board of directors. They won't be back before eight. They'll ring Rachel, and she'll come tomorrow, unless you and I drive up to London to see her for lunch."

"Not a bad idea."

The ritual awkwardness of family visits after long periods of absence enshrouded them. They sat in silence. John cleared his throat.

"I could run the bath for you. Did you get back by coach?"

"Yes. And the Chunnel. Then train to Wendover."

"The Chunnel! Every continental riff-raff will be here soon," she sighed. "I'll unpack, shall I?" And then checked herself. He only had that small cheap duffel.

Johnny smiled.

“It’s okay mum. Don’t try too hard. I’ll have a bath. There’s nothing to unpack, anyway. I’m broke. Need a loan.”

*What was her son into? Five years of absence and not a word, now he comes home broke and looking hard as no man has a right to.*

“Don’t worry about money, John. You have a bath, then go to The Red Lion and have a drink. I’ll ring Robert and dad. They’ll see you there after their meeting. Then you all come home for dinner. While you’re in the bath, I’ll run and draw out some money. Do you owe anybody?”

He felt overwhelmed. He looked her in the eyes and said: “No mum. No debts.” He gave her a hug.

“No, you never had money trouble, John. I’ll get you a thousand pounds from my account and don’t tell your dad. It’ll be enough to tide you for a while.”

Feeling fresh and clean after his bath, his mother’s thousand pounds in cash a comfort to the wallet in his hip pocket, Johnny walked down Wendover high street, past the shop windows. Britain still retained the old charm, certainly in the rural South. A shattered shop window reminded him that no corner was really safe from the ravages of post-empire stress disorder. Still, he felt a far cry from a Rambo coming home to street mayhem. He recognized nobody. At the end, he turned right, then left and crossed the road to the courtyard of The Red Lion.

It took Ron a second to recognize him. His seamed face split into a Farmer Jones grin.

## BLOOD MONEY

“John!” he exclaimed, and came around the bar counter to pump his hand. Pat, his wife, had a face lit up like a Christmas tree. She gave him a hug and a kiss.

“Haven’t seen you for years Johnny. You look very different,” she said.

“Both of you look the same. Pat looks prettier.”

She tossed her head. As a teenager, John used to fancy her, much to Ron’s amusement.

The Red Lion was a typical rural pub. Low ceiling, old beams with uneven plaster, well-worn planks on the floor, and the right sort of football trophies behind the counter. Two businessmen nursed their shorts in a corner, three workmen with forearms festooned with tattoos had big grins and held foaming beer mugs. They had finished a hard day’s work, and talking football would round it off before they went home for their bangers and mash or spagbog or curry or whatever “ ‘er indoors” had decided to flog on the table this evening.

John exchanged nods with them.

“How’s business, Ron?”

“Not too bad. Surviving the recession. And I don’t have to lease the pub from the breweries. I own it now.”

“It wasn’t right, John,” Pat added. “Pub owners had to lease premises from the likes of beer-brewers, or they didn’t get anything delivered. Then the law was passed, and now we actually own it.”

“Well, the bank does,” Ron added.

“Like most of everything else,” John remarked.

“You’ve been away a long time, John,” Pat pointedly remarked.

“Yes, the continent.”

The husband and wife exchanged looks, but didn't say anything.

“You gonna stay long?” Ron inquired.

“Probably. I'm not sure.”

Ron's face creased into another grin. He went back to his place behind the bar.

“A pint?”

“Sure, and for you and Pat.”

Ron shook his head firmly.

“The first round's on us, John. Good to see you.”

John put his elbow on the bar and nearly disbalanced. Then he remembered that although on average the English were taller than the French, their bars were lower. Ron missed nothing but said nothing either. *So we've been loafing in la belle France, me lad!*

“Cheers!”

They clinked glasses and the workmen grinned at John. One of them, a young lad in his teens, drew him into a discussion about football. John was soon involved in an animated conversation that went back and forth with friendly passion. *God - but it was good to be back in England!* The beer was rich, dark and cool, the people the same. This was where he should stay. He wouldn't join his father's firm, but maybe he could get an appointment as a forest guard or something. Friendship, good cheer and bonhomie pervaded the pub and time went back a few centuries. This was what made England great. The clock behind the bar showed quarter to eight. Robert and dad would be getting here soon. They had just started their third round of drinks when the door to the pub opened and shattered the

## BLOOD MONEY

spell.

In three determined strides Martin Rogers was at John's side.

John went still, absolutely still.

"Good evening, Lieutenant Beresford."

"Sergeant-Major Rogers."

They were coldly polite to each other, but the workmen and Ron and Pat sensed something different between these two men. The world withdrew and time stood still.

"Buy me a beer?"

Their eyes locked. Neither man dared move his from the other's.

"If you want to call a truce," Johnny replied.

"War hero. That's what you are, Beresford."

"This is no accident, your coming here."

"No. Somebody rang last night. He told me you might stop by. You joined the French Foreign Légion, I hear."

The twinge swirled up and turned into a whirlwind of demons. Johnny's alarm bells jangled. He put his beer on the bar.

Martin Rogers expertly ejected a thin stream of spittle into Johnny's beer. The last vestiges of emotion were sprayed off Johnny's soul.

"Lieutenant Beresford of the SAS and Froggie fuckin' Légion. War hero. Shot his best friend in the Falklands."

"Shut up Rogers."

Rogers feinted with a left hook, then twisted the other way, aiming the second knuckles of his right hand at Johnny's crotch. Johnny was fast, knew the classic



move, and took the blow on his forearm. It hurt. Rogers ducked a two-finger stab at his eyes and the two men squared off, venom filling the space between them.

“I’m gonna kill you, Beresford,” Martin promised.

Johnny swept the glasses off the bar, away from Martin.

There was a loud crash and gasps from Ron and Pat. Perfect diversion, even for a Sergeant-Major of the SBS.

Johnny slipped into Martin’s guard and struck him inside the armpits with the stiffened fingers of both hands, dislocating both shoulders. He took a half-pace back, then hooked him with a double left in the crotch. Before Martin could slide to the floor, he hit him under the nose with the edge of his left hand, pulping the soft bones inside.

Martin crashed down in a swath of his own blood. His face was a lacerated watermelon. Johnny prepared to jump on him with both feet. Ron saw the tensed muscles, knew what he was going to do.

“John, no,” he pleaded. “It’ll be a jump straight into Wormwoods prison, for life.”

Johnny turned to look at him, and Ron was frightened by the vacuum eyes.

“Self-defence. He started it. Remember to tell the police that.”

“We will, mate. Don’t worry,” the older of the three men at the bar reassured him.

In actual fact, nobody had seen Martin’s move – only Johnny’s.

Johnny walked to the coat stand and put his jacket on.

## BLOOD MONEY

“You better wait for the police. Run away and they’ll pin a grievous bodily harm on you, whatever we say,” Pat reasoned. “Where’re you off to?”

“Home,” Johnny replied coldly. “Thanks for the drink. And don’t forget to call an ambulance.”

He turned and his dad and Robert were there, smiles frozen in tragi-comic shock.

“John ...” his father began.

“Okay, let’s go out and talk.”

They stood in the courtyard in shocked silence.

“Don’t say anything. That bastard lying in there was the Sergeant-Major of the SBS who nearly killed me on the iceberg. He jumped me again.”

“I’m sorry, John,” his father said in bewilderment. “But you’re my son. We’ll get the best defense ...”

“Dad, don’t argue. I love you all. Give me your car keys and do as I say otherwise the police could charge you for aiding and abetting.”

With the keys in his hand, Johnny whispered harshly, “Robert, shout – *John, you idiot.*”

When Johnny pushed Robert to the ground, his surprised ‘*John you idiot*’ was genuine.

The Rover roared to life and Johnny scattered a few people going up the high street.

He parked on a scruffy piece of derelict land a hundred yards from the station. The same taxi with the surly Pakistani driver waited outside. He would remember Johnny, which fit in with what he planned to do.

“Victoria Station, please,” Johnny said.

“*What ... London?*”

“Unless you know of a Victoria Station nearer. The

boat train. I can pay.” Johnny spread out some of the new banknotes notes his mother had given him like a fan of cards. The driver wouldn’t forget this trip.

They drove to London in silence.

*Who’d known he was coming back to England?*

Only Nathalie. Who did she tell? Or was it her? No. Martin Rogers had said “*he*.” The big question was – *WHY?*

He would re-enlist. The only logical option. But this time he would stay in touch with his family. Who else could he trust but family and Légion – dammit, Légion and family ... one in the same.

This time, though, only the Légion and family, family and Légion, would know where and who – and even *if* – Johnny was.

He’d been at sea for less than ten minutes. But he’d been in the ferryboat’s bar for over an hour awaiting the sailing. Enough time to rile the bunch of shaven-headed football fans on their way to think of England and bash the shit out of a few homeside supporters at the St Germain match. Swilling pastis and using a heavy French accent was all it had taken to make him the center of aggressive attention.

Now, eyes wild, backing off from the thugs, Johnny stood barefoot on the guard-rail of the lower deck of the Dover-Calais ferry, balancing himself with outspread arms. Nothing between him and the inky sea. Daring them to cause murder rather than just a few broken teeth.

## BLOOD MONEY

The evening lights of Dover flickered behind him in the cutting channel breeze. Six of the toughs stood around him in a semicircle with beercans in their hands and hate in their eyes.

Johnny took off his shirt, swung it around his head, and let it fly to the deck. In its top pocket was folded an empty envelope addressed to his family, a pictorial calling card from The Red Lion where he'd all-but killed his former comrade, and his ferry ticket.

He teetered dangerously, then steadied himself. The grinning group was disappointed.

"Fuck it all!" Johnny screamed. "Fuck you all. Come on, bastards. Here's a man with nothing left to lose ... not even his fuckin' shirt! Fight me here on the rail. Life or fuckin' de..."

Despite the calm sea, the ferry had a slight roll. Johnny wobbled, bent his knees, and the lager louts leaned forward in anticipation. Johnny's eyes were watering and seemed unfocused as he cast a glance over his shoulder and then back to his eager audience. But his mind was crystal clear. The two, heavily diluted, anis inside him and the dozen he'd quietly tipped over the bar into its tin sink ensured that.

Before starting his act, he had locked himself in a toilet cubicle, rubbing a fourteen-ounce tub of Vaseline over every inch of his body. Victoria Station – the starting point of the rail-sea-link to France – offered everything from power ties to teas, from newsagents, to a well-stocked pharmacy.

The super-strength lagers he'd bought on the train's standup bar on the trip to the ferry port had gone the same way as his

anis ... out of the window and now nurturing rail track weeds.

He pretended to fall and then regain his balance. There was a hiss from the growing crowd of red-and-white scarved hooligans. They were all for a bunch-to-one battle, but not on Johnny's guard-rail terms. One brave soul snatched up Johnny's discarded shoes and threw them overboard with a sneer that suggested a mortal blow.

The deep blue sea brought out the cowardly devil in them. They shouted a good fight, but kept their feet firmly on deck.

Chill rain began to knife down.

"Take a dive, froggy asshole. Gi'us a dive to Gay fuckin' Pareeee!" They goaded him hoarsely, willing the scene to end with a splash so they could escape the weather and boast in the warm bar with nothing worse than damp shoulders to announce them as both victorious warriors and innocent bystanders.

From the corner of his eye Johnny could see the purser and two crewmen edging towards him.

He pointed a finger at them with a sudden "*Putain!* Help me for fuck's sake ... these cunts will ..."

Heads swiftly turned, and the purser and his sailors checked their steps to face the thugs.

At that moment, Johnny took a deep breath and made his move, hitting the icy water like an arrow in a perfect, splashless dive.

When eyes flashed back to where he should have been, there were cries of *oh fuck* and *shit* and '*e fockin' done it!*

The purser said nothing. He blew a whistle, then

## BLOOD MONEY

spoke into his communicator. Alarm bells sounded, and floodlights flashed on, scanning the sea. The ferry slowed, then stopped. A group of sailors rushed to free a lifeboat, while the Captain's calm voice tried to reassure passengers that there was a slight mechanical hitch.

Already a hundred yards away, Johnny surfaced in the dark. He had struggled out of his trousers and now wore only a pair of cheap swimming trunks from the ferry store. His money and papers were water-tight in layers of clingfilm taped to the inside of his thigh, ripped from the wrapped sandwiches he'd bought at another of Victoria station's convenience stores. There were even a few franc notes and coins in there, change from the ferry bar.

He started a slow breaststroke to limber up to the encroaching cold. He changed to a crawl, alternating with breaststroke and flipping on his back. He aimed his strokes at the stars he knew as well as points on a map.

There was an eighteen-mile swim ahead to reach France ... air-sea rescue would be scouring English coastal waters for the body of a hopeless drunk who'd taken the plunge a couple of miles from land ... no-one would think to make a check on the impossibly distant coast of France.

Before dawn – even before the Ferry had arrived in Calais because of the rescue holdup – Johnny dragged himself ashore on the rocks of Cap Griz-Nez, cold, tired, wet – and dead to the world!

Allison Beresford busied herself at the ironing board. There was a pile to do. Her John had no luck. He would spend his life like a dust devil. She could only pray for her son.

The phone rang.

She picked it up, gasped, and listened intently, punctuating the conversation at the other end with a series of English onomatopoeias, then put the receiver down, eyes wet and cross with herself for it.

Johnny hung up the phone. At least he wouldn't have to put his family through mourning, They would have to go through the motions for him, of course. And they would – without asking questions. His dash from the near-lethal bar-room fight in England would satisfy them to his need for flight.

And the recruiting officers of the Légion would take care of the rest. *Voilà du boudin!*

All he had to do now was use the last of his francs to buy a huge baguette and a huger cognac coffee, then exchange some English pounds with the bar tender into more francs to cover the price of a bus ticket ... and a new shirt, shoes and jeans.

His tale of a crazy stag party skinny-dip might serve him well enough in this tiny Normandy bar, but it wouldn't last him all the way to Paris.

The barman, a couple of early locals, took the story with a laugh and free, warming cognacs for his bravery. He got a more than fair exchange rate for his pound

## BLOOD MONEY

notes. And even a visiting birdwatcher – out of place in his Barbours and with heavy binoculars around his neck – raised a smile and called in a round in celebration of the young swimmer's bravado.

That afternoon, Johnny stepped from the coach in Paris, feeling stiff-legged. The Napoleonic majesty of the Place des Invalides was as impressive as usual. He paid the toilet lady twenty francs, and washed up, although he couldn't shave. He had another foot-long ham and cheese sandwich and coffee, and felt better for it. Then, he bought a first-class ticket for the Metro. They weren't expensive, and he wanted to avoid any hassle. The Paris underground was full of young toughs who'd mug you for cigarette and beer money. Johnny could cope with the thugs, but not with the attention.

After three changes and no unpleasant incident, he reached the Gare de Lyon. There was a high-speed train for Grenoble in an hour. He spent some more of his mother's thousand pounds and bought a single first-class ticket. It was less than a three-hour run. He decided he'd practice his French and bought a copy of *Le Monde*. His brain was working now, and he was pleased with his decisions. He would first sort out the Nathalie link, then swallow pride and ask his father for some money. He'd join one of the intensive French courses at a university – why not Grenoble? He'd then re-enlist, and aim for becoming an officer. In the meantime, if the British police managed to trace him, he'd abort his course and enlist right away. He sat on a



plastic chair and tried to make sense of the confused jumble of high-faluting French that jumped out at him from the pages of the newspaper.

“Johnny! You’re back in France!”

He looked up and swept Nathalie into his arms. She put her head on his chest and nuzzled him. Then they kissed, and she wouldn’t let go. He could actually feel her heart beating. Her breasts were marvelous and her thighs urgent.

“I missed you, missed you,” she whispered.

It was too genuine to be an act. He sat her next to him, and she put both hands around his cheeks and kissed him. Something had happened, she knew. His face had the hardness of a determined combat soldier, not an ex-soldier. This was somebody *in* the profession. And he was back early. She wanted to know why.

“I missed you too, Nathalie.”

“Why’re you back so soon?” she asked, her voice torn between her own happiness and his.

‘*Why are you here?*’ he thought, but said: “I’m gonna re-enlist.”

“Johnny, why?” Her heart thumped. This was premature, unless something had happened or been made to happen in Britain she knew nothing about.

He ignored the question. “I’ll get a loan from my father, and spend three months doing an intensive French course at a university. Then I’ll re-enlist, and in five years get a commission. The alternative is a shorter course, or failing that, enlist right away.”

## BLOOD MONEY

His voice was matter-of-fact and decided. It was the voice of a company commander who had finalized his battle plan.

“Wait. Think about it. You lost your commission and served as another rank. Five years of it is enough. Maybe you won’t get your commission back in one way, but you will in another. A Pakistani Légionnaire who had lost his commission in Pakistan, did his PhD in English at Grenoble University. The day he got his PhD, he said he’d got his pips back – with sweat and blood.”

He was watching her closely, his antennae searching. The faintest of hints of the twinge was back, but the twinge itself wasn’t there.

“How d’you know?”

“I went to the doctoral defense. It was on William Faulkner.”

They exchanged smiles and kissed again.

“You could do something like that, Johnny. Not very exciting, maybe, but you’ll get your honor back.”

“What about re-enlisting?”

Her eyes flashed.

“You’ve done your bit. Great warrior monks!” She spat. “You’re just an expendable foreigner who’s pumped up to die in place of a Frenchman.”

He was surprised. She was completely sincere and it was not usual for a French person to admit such a truth. *She hasn’t fallen in love, has she? That could be useful!*

“I’d never have expected you to say something like that!”

She gently shook his shoulders.

“Légionnaires live an illusion. The reality is that someone with less than one-fourth of your brain snaps his fingers and you jump. You want to go back to that?”

“Maybe I haven’t got an alternative.”

Her face was expressionless but her eyes were pleading. *To what?*

“Something happened in England. What was it?”

“I had a fight in the local pub.”

“And then?”

“I left the bloke on the floor. A few upper teeth and phalanges smashed, maybe castrated for life.”

His tone held no remorse, no regret.

She looked frightened.

“It was ex-Sergeant-Major Martin Rogers of the SBS. He came looking for me. He knew I’d be there. Just like you knew I’d be here”

Her eyes were full of fear and his alarm bells jangled. *Yes, she was in it up to her neck*, but he also knew that joy at seeing him were genuine, and her protective attitude towards his re-enlistment sincere. He would need a softly-softly approach. She looked straight into his eyes and waited with the courage of a person who feels fear.

“Someone had phoned him. A man. I wonder how he knew?”

Nathalie had never been so frightened in her life. She had first-handedly experienced the violence this man was capable of. There was only one way. Walk the razor’s edge.

“I told him Johnny,” she said in a small voice, still looking at him.

“Why?”

## BLOOD MONEY

She sighed.

“Because I had to.”

“You had to,” he repeated. The twinge seemed to blossom, and began to take on a comprehensible shape. Like a surrealist painting that assumes coherence for the viewer after a time, when he can commune with its creator. “Is this some sort of a cloak and dagger game I’m being pulled into?”

“Yes.”

“Were you told I’d be here?”

“More or less.”

“How did they know I’d be here ... here ... here and now?”

Nathalie looked bewildered. Her eyes told him she didn’t have a clue.

His mind went back to the fight – as well-organized as any Don King championship boxing match. The two suited men in the corner quietly sipping pink gins. Not raising an eyebrow as the blood flowed. The ferry barman with the secret grin as Johnny tipped his pastis into the sink. The ‘birdwatcher’ in the bar at the Cap when he changed his pounds for currency to buy a bus ticket. Those were pretty heavy duty bins for an amateur.

Johnny smiled. “OK. I think I know the answer to that. I was tailed from the tap room of a bloody country pub in England to right where we stand. Some fucking organisation you skivvy for!”

“Yes. Some fucking organisation, Johnny.”

“Oh I see. You’re Mata Hari, and a great fuck, and now we’re playing the *dénouement*, but you can’t tell me. It’s all top secret.”

His voice was low, but frighteningly hard. Bitter.

She licked her lips.

“Johnny, I never said I loved you. Neither did you. But when I saw you a few minutes ago, my heart leapt into my mouth. I don’t know what it was. Maybe it’s love, maybe not. But I care for you very deeply.”

“Oh yeah. So do I!”

“You do, even if you don’t realize it. Little things made you jealous from the beginning – me too. Have you ever wondered why?”

“No, I’m too busy wondering why the hell this great love of my life is hand in glove with someone who’s trying to fuck me back into the Légion.”

“No Johnny, that’s not true. That’s the last thing we want you to do.”

“We? Who the hell is *we*? Lover-boy you went to dinner with? He tells you who to fuck?”

“No, no, that’s not true. I swear to you.”

He took a deep breath.

“I’m listening.”

“My work at the CNRS is a cover. Well, I *am* a bona fide researcher, but for some operations my services are unofficially claimed by an intra-European intelligence organization.”

“I didn’t know there was one.”

“Officially, we don’t exist. We’re either police officers, or academics or researchers or even intelligence officers. And we are *not* vigilantes. We have the official but unwritten sanction of Britain, France, Germany and the United States. Our lines of communication, meetings and training are bafflingly simple in their secrecy.

## BLOOD MONEY

“World terrorism, supported by the KGB, should have disappeared after the implosion of the USSR. It has taken on a new dimension, and Islamic terrorism is its core. The collapse of the BCCI bank hasn’t braked it either. Hassan Abbadie, the President of the BCCI, conveniently became ‘medically unfit’ to be moved from Pakistan, one of our closest allies in Asia. However, he’s inactive, and so’s BCCI, but the coordination of operations continues.”

The Gare de Lyon was an ideal place for such a briefing. The noises of a busy station masked their conversation. They looked like any young couple waiting for a train and having an earnest conversation.

“There is only one long-term Islamic plan – to retrieve a lost destiny to lead the world. Not to improve the condition of mankind, not to bring about socio-political change, but to be the dominant power that *decides* the values for the entire world. Anything that helps to destabilize the West is in line with their long-term policy.

“The person who spins this spider’s web is the keystone. We learnt a lesson from BCCI. We let Abbadie live, hoping he could be tried and the whole plot unraveled. We made a mistake. We don’t want to repeat it.”

“So the plan now is to take out the center player. And I’m supposed to play The Jackal. How cute.”

“Johnny, it’s not cute. Nobody’s using you like cannon fodder. You’re the best.”

“Yeah. Why me? Thousands of Légionnaires and ex-SAS men are floating around Europe doing crummy little jobs. Any one of them would do it if the money was

right.”

“That’s true, Johnny. But you’re different. You have the training and temperament of an officer. You were a crack officer. Sandhurst and SAS. Then things went wrong, and you didn’t go downhill, morally downhill like a lot of people would have. You had the character to enlist as an ordinary rank and file private in the Légion to save yourself and your family embarrassment. You have a public school background, and your family has a long history of loyal and faithful service to Britain. You withstood the stress of being an OR in the Légion superbly well, getting rapid promotions ...”

“... And I’m desperate, have no place to run to, and need money. You knew all this before you met me.”

“No, I swear I didn’t. Only that there would be this ex-Légionnaire, he’d be lying in a square, that I’d pick him up. I swear Johnny. I wanted to know more but I was told I wouldn’t act naturally if I knew more. I’m not an actress.”

Again, he believed her. If the puppet masters had done their homework, there was no need to give her his whole dossier. Proximity would catalyze a natural chemistry.

“So the mugging was a put-up job.”

“Yes.”

“Good. I want the watch back. And the money.”

She lowered her eyes and he had an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. *The bastards!*

“No operation’s perfect. There’ve been two flaws so far. You decided to go back to Britain ...”

“... Sooner than expected?” he sneered.

She ignored that.

## BLOOD MONEY

“And the agent responsible for the mugging operation knew *absolutely nothing* about what was behind it. He was incapable of assessing the worth of the watch.”

“What the hell did he do with it?”

“Flogged it to a tourist for two hundred dollars. We’ll never be able to trace it, Johnny. For whatever it’s worth, believe me, the field controller of the operation is distraught.”

“Distraught,” Johnny repeated.

He was in a cold rage, but his brain was icily clear. *Think, Johnny, think – use that muscle between your ears.*

“Okay. It’s gone, it’s gone. I suppose your organization will give the money back, plus a lot more for doing their dirty work!”

“Yes. But it’s not dirty work. It’s work to keep Europe going. The West, Britain, France, us. You’re a professional soldier. The process by which a soldier achieves nobility is often dirty.”

“Not often. Always.”

“I know, Johnny. Look at all these people swirling around us. Worried about their trains and their little mortgages and dinners and cars and oil-changes. They don’t know what keeps the whole machine ticking. Not many people do, and among those that do, not many are willing to join the ranks of the unsung heroes.”

“So that’s how you’re selling me this pathetic little hit? I’m gonna be an unsung hero who was paid a packet. Because believe me, Nathalie, however much I might care for you, this hit is gonna cost you guys. And nothing happens until I meet the head-man. When I say



head-man, I mean head-man. I'll know. As you pointed out, I come from a distinguished family and I used to be an officer. I can smell Generals when I meet them – or someone of equivalent civilian status.”

“I'll get the message across, Johnny. That's all I can promise. But can I say something?”

“Yeah.”

“Don't denigrate yourself. It's not a pathetic little hit. It has more importance than The Jackal's target -- bloody Charles De Gaulle himself. The elimination of this man will promote Western stability by a decade, and set these guys back at least twenty years.”

“Not the elimination of a single man.”

“There's something else, but I don't know what it is.”

“Hunh,” he snorted. “The old need to know. Flog me that now!” But again, he believed her.

“Now us. Where do we stand?”

“How?”

“Let's say I accept the contract. I haven't accepted it yet. But let's say I do. Let's say it's successful. What happens after that? Do I get to spend the money you guys pay me? Do I ride off into the sunset? Do we get married and live in a little cottage in Colchester and have kids? How the hell do you guys make sure I keep my mouth shut forever? Or do you then leak my file to Hizbullah or Islamic Jihad or someone so they can get me?”

His voice was conversational, and low, and challenging. Each question pinched her heart a little. She had no answer, and her eyes were troubled by it. John noticed and it was the beginning of the way out. He smiled at her.

## BLOOD MONEY

“We’ve got another twenty-five minutes’ wait. What about a quick lunch at the buffet?”

## CHAPTER NINE

Bushra Butt was in video-conference with the Khan. She leaned back in her chair, eyes on the sharp resolution of the Hewlett Packard monitor, which showed Mohammed Kamal Khan, Khan of Gunda, and the Tarangs bent over the briefing paper. In her peripheral vision there was another perfect day, with not a cloud in sight, except the mists crowning the soaring peaks in the far background. The pure white snow was blinding where it reflected light. The shadows rested in the topographical folds devoid of light. The sunlight streaming into the Khan's study highlighted his father's portrait. Bushra Butt and the Khan were in the shadows.

From a distinguished Kashmiri family of carpet exporters, Bushra Butt's education included an obligatory stint in Europe – a year each at Oxford and the Sorbonne. She had spent another year at Berkeley to better understand the liberal currents of the Sixties that might be harnessed for the *Halqa's* purposes. In her thirties, she had chosen to stay single, unusual for a Pakistani girl. She was dedicated to the cause of Islamic renaissance through whatever means necessary. Her degrees in psychology and international affairs, a classical family education, undoubted talents

## BLOOD MONEY

in analysis and bold imagination made her a formidable analyst, consultant and case officer. She had the lithe full figure, height, fair skin and innate sexiness of Kashmiri women, which had made them most popular in the mogul harems. After the brilliance of her operations in Somalia and Sudan, she had been selected by the Khan to head Yarmouk – the penetration of the Western media by infiltrating Clean-Alpes, which would allow the *Halqa* to exploit the Gunda diamond reserves, eventually take over Clean-Alpes, and the Western media. The West would be overturned from within, by using its own strength, just as, fourteen hundred odd years ago, in the battle of Yarmouk, on August 20, 636 AD, six thousand Islamic warriors had maneuvered and deceived a force of sixty thousand Byzantine Christians to change history to their advantage and to that of Rome. In the days preceding the battle, Khalid bin al-Walid's agents had successfully sowed dissension within Theodorus' ranks. This time, too, deception and internal subversion would be their tools, and the results no less decisive.

The final meeting would be held in Grenoble in two week's time. Leaders – powerful men with powerful convictions on the environment – would meet to decide the fate of the planet. Gunda would be fused with Clean-Alpes, securing it against the constant niggling from Pakistan's Inter-Services-Intelligence. And, of course, the powerful and greedy old men of Wall Street would grow richer speculating on the diamond market. That obviously included the Butt Group, her own family,

with whom she would share the information. And she would lead the emancipation of Islamic women in the New World. They would show the Western feminists what Muslim women could do, and stand out as a model for the modern woman.

The Khan looked up from the brief, and Bushra composed herself for his comments. They spoke in English, their voices over the mike clear, their images on the screen sharp.

“Very good brief, Bushra. I expected no less. The financial details are meticulously outlined. The movement of money using Dubai, the Canaries and the Seychelles is superb. Like with BCCI, we won't let the Swiss do us in a second time. And using an Isle of Man account as the clearinghouse right in the British backyard is a stroke of genius.”

“Khaled Ben al-Walid and Babur's genius, Khan sahib. Two great Muslim generals, both masters in the center and flank maneuvers to make the enemy's center collapse. Deception is a military science practiced by the geniuses of Islam.”

“No doubt. And those pompous fools at the Pakistan Military Academy study Clausewitz, Bismarck, Napoleon, Saxe and Jomini and Allah knows which other dead white males! The legal structure allowing the merging of our Karakorum Action and Clean-Alpes is intricate and foolproof, especially where it smoothly allows for the entry of our diamonds on the market.”

“Judicial procedure is your forte,” the Khan murmured.

“No, Khan sahib. The same British Indo-Pakistani Muslim lawyers who orchestrated the demand for an

## BLOOD MONEY

Islamic parliament in Britain, setting off a constitutional crisis and delaying Britain's active participation in the EU, and derailing the Exchange Rate Mechanism for the new EU currency, the Euro, were drafted for this project."

"What about security?"

"The British backyard again. Who would suspect that a remote Karakorum khanate would have British lawyers draft up a key section of the Caliphate's mechanism?"

"Brilliant. What's the latest on the Agha Khan's financial empire?"

"Still in the doldrums. The changes of government in Italy have done little for the Ciga Group."

"My vision of Islam does not challenge my loyalty to the moderate and modernist Agha Khan, who is the living Imam for all us Tarangs – hundred percent Ismailis."

Bushra Butt, a devout Sunni, acknowledged his sectarian loyalty. Her heart knew that the New Islamic World Order would be Sunni, and the Khan would have to give up this archaic loyalty to a reputedly secretive sect.

"Of course, Khan Sahib. The diamonds belong to Gunda, and you have a duty to support your Imam's financial empire in Europe. And his strict neutrality and complete ignorance of the *Halqa* is of vital importance to our plans."

"Exactly. When he was the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees, Islam had a legitimacy that we all sheltered under. If he could be appointed the Secretary-General of the United Nations, just by virtue

of his position, we would gain stature. That is why we dare not activate Operation Constantinople.”

“You’re right.”

Operation Constantinople had been Bushra Butt’s brainchild. A bold plan to maneuver the Agha Khan into the Secretary General’s position. The Khan had angrily vetoed it. If the Imam ever knew of it, he would excommunicate him. Consequently, the Agha Khan had been rejected in favor of Boutros Boutros Ghali, an Egyptian Copt married to a Jew, in turn succeeded by a black Ghanaian with an MIT background. Perfect chemistry to conciliate the major pressure groups in the world. The Khan sensed Bushra’s disappointment.

“Your recommendation about Operation Mobilization was very positive. They are dedicated Christian missionaries. Their reports are honest and undoctored, and read by the CIA to corroborate their own reports. As long as we allow them to smuggle their Bibles into China – in fact even help them – they are bound to keep attention away from us. Their reports have consistently described us as an idyllic, pastoral folk leading a storybook existence among misty glaciers and hanging gardens. How is their representative in Gilgit?”

Bushra gave a dimpled smile, and the Khan sighed inwardly at her inescapable attractiveness, somehow more exciting on the HP monitor because she was even more unreachable. *Blast!* She was too dedicated to the Cause.

“He’s happy with his Cambridge Bible College degree and fluent grasp of all our mountain languages. His wife, the nurse, is popular with the locals. Mr and

## BLOOD MONEY

Mrs Michael Bashir are the most popular lowland Pakistanis in these valleys. People ignore the fact that they are Christian, and the odd Mullah who does so is warned off by your soldiers. So far, using caravan trucks, they have smuggled an estimated twenty-five million Bibles into China. As I predicted, the Bibles have had an indirect effect on the massive conversions in China, but our area of interest, Muslim majority Zhingyang Province, remains an Islamic citadel.”

“Which would suit us perfectly when the inevitable break-up of China comes.” He was pleased to see that Bushra’s poise was back. “Christian missionaries, for all their investment in prayers and money, have never had much success in converting Muslims,” he added.

“You’ll be leaving in a couple of weeks, then?”

“Yes.”

“We’re worried about security. Taking your son Rustam makes you vulnerable.”

“To what?”

“Kidnapping and blackmail, kidnapping and assassination.”

“Whose assassination?”

“Yours. In a year from now, the merger and media infiltration will be complete. The diamonds will be on the market as part of the Gunda Trust. In another year your death will not destroy the *Halqa*. Today, it would destroy everything.”

“Not destroy,” he said musingly. “Set back.”

“No, Khan Sahib,” she said firmly, her face on the screen displaying absolute certainty. “If Western agencies decide to eliminate you, they would only do so by coordinating an attack on *Halqa* headquarters



here.”

“That’s impossible. How would they do it? Air raid? Paratroops? The Tarangs would decimate them! Even the Pakistanis wouldn’t tolerate it.”

“I don’t know how, but I know they would. Ever since their renaissance, these people have been light-years ahead of us.” There was a catch in her voice. Her eyes had the impenetrable light of the true fanatic.

“We can’t predict everything. Rehana and Rustam are necessary for cover, and to throw the dogs off the scent. My security precautions were put into place two years ago by Major Khuda Dad Khan, adjutant of the Tarang Scouts, and my security officer. He’s also my nephew, and has sworn on the Koran to protect me as his liege lord. However, I can’t go to Europe with a phalanx of Tarangs. Only Ghazanfar and Dildar will accompany me. But there are other arrangements.

“Four young Arabs were recruited in France on the recommendation of Algerian Military Intelligence. All four were born in France, and chose to do two years national service in Algeria rather than France, something allowed by French law. Very normal for them as Muslims to be loyal to their own. They came to the attention of Algerian intelligence on a commando course, and in expressing their open hatred for France, where they feel alienated. All four were then sent to Sudan, and eventually did the finishing course under Mubarak Janjua at our Farm. All four are the only Arabs employed with a bodyguard agency. We contracted with this agency for my protection in Europe, and asked for the CV’s of all their personnel.”

“Very normal, especially considering the small

## BLOOD MONEY

fortune they'll make out of you."

"Exactly. In addition to Ghazanfar and Dildar who'll accompany me, the four young wolves honed by Mubarak Janjua at the Farm have been selected as guard commanders. I will be protected round-the-clock by one of the guard commanders overseeing three other guards."

"What's the level of competence of these other guards?"

"They have all served with impeccable discipline and combat records in the French Foreign Légion. Are you still worried?"

In the dark emptiness of infinite space, the billion dollar satellite picked up every word and beamed it in real-time to the American National Security Agency. They were very lucky that day. A computer programmed a random listening pattern for all strategic targets. Often there was nothing. This time, the random spot check had hit pay dirt. The technician who received the automatically scrambled recording understood nothing, but she was still excited. The last three listening spot checks of the same target had been blank. This one was full. She wondered what the cloak and dagger business was all about as she transferred the recording to high priority. Some case officer in some spook agency somewhere would receive it and unscramble it. Then he would know what to do with it, if anything.

She sighed and picked up Stephen Hawking's latest book on the origins of the universe.

## CHAPTER TEN

The study of the rural church had been superbly restored under the supervision of an Egyptian Copt married to a Frenchwoman. As an architect he was renowned for church restoration. Rightly so, for had not St Anthony been an Egyptian who had converted the heretical Arians of Isère? The walls were off-white plaster, the floor of stone. It didn't smell musty. The pervading odor was that of warm dry fresh plaster and full-cut stone. The walls were book lined from floor to ceiling. Some were old tomes bound in leather, others had glossy spines with colorful dust jackets. All were meticulously classified. In the center of the fourteen square yard room was an old walnut desk, cleared of all papers. The single window in the East wall gave a superb view of rolling meadow and abundant forests of the Chartreuse range. At six in the evening, no sunlight came through.

The light in the room came from the desk lamp. Its beam was directed in Johnny's face. Not so powerful as to intimidate him, but strong enough to make the person sitting in the shadows behind the lamp unidentifiable. He was there voluntarily, to learn the terms of the contract being offered. He had wanted to see the head-man. Only it was a woman with an

## BLOOD MONEY

American accent. Behind her, in the deeper shadows, with a cowl over his face, was the Copt priest, but Johnny didn't recognize him. He was a vague blur on a stool in a corner.

"So that about sums it up. You understand what the Schengen Group is all about. Just learning the name initiates you into the secret," Agatha's cold-blooded American voice explained. It didn't impress Johnny.

"I suppose I'm meant to feel privileged."

She ignored his dry comment and went on, "Like a lot of people, you read press reports about BCCI, Islamic terrorism the Islamic bomb, the movement of terrorist camps from Algeria to Cuba to Eastern Europe, the Arab countries, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. About money from pro-Western oil rich states financing terrorism against the West. About money-laundering operations. You had speculated from time to time whether there was a method to all this madness – a central policy, and some sort of coordination from Indonesia to the Black Muslims of the United States. You now know that in the Seventies and Eighties the head of the octopus was BCCI, but we botched up its dismantling. Now the *Halqa* has shown itself to be the true head of the octopus. This time we won't cut it down with rules and regulations hoping for the high moral ground. The Khan of Gunda could be good or evil – it's not up to me to make a moral judgment. But he is prejudicial to the interests of our civilization; he threatens the survival of our next generation. We want him out of the picture – permanently."

"The way you describe the *Halqa* up in its Karakorum fastness, inaccessible, guarded by a few

thousand Tarangs armed to the teeth and trained to a peak, with the blood of hereditary assassins, why the hell should the removal of this Paki stop the other Pakis from business as usual? I got here at two pm. It's now six fifteen. Everything you've said you've backed up with top-secret documents and you've let me read them. Everything I've read leads me to believe that one Paki more or less won't stop the *Halqa*."

"You're right. That's why this is crucial. If you accept the contract, the hit will be coordinated with an attack that will ensure the complete destruction of the *Halqa* headquarters."

"I'm curious, especially out of professional interest."

"Sorry. You're not cleared to receive that information."

"Fair enough. So we've now established a moral reason for eliminating your Paki. What are your terms?"

"We would like to recruit you as a permanent operative of the Schengen Group."

"Yeah. The part-time butcher."

"Wrong. A highly valued operative cleared for terminal assignments."

"Salary, terms of service, status."

"You are at liberty to accept this contract and refuse permanent employment. Whatever you decide will not alter the terms of the present contract."

"You get a hundred thousand pounds in cash. Twenty-five when you accept the contract, twenty-five more twenty-four hours before the hit, when you present your final plan. Fifty percent after the hit. Fifty thousand francs in cash for expenses when you accept the contract. Anything you can extort from the subject

## BLOOD MONEY

belongs to you.”

“You’re hiring a mercenary at these generous terms. An expendable mercenary?”

“Everybody gets paid. I get a salary, but I’m not a mercenary. No. We’d like to recruit you.”

“Terms of service.”

“Subject to your performance during the execution of the present contract.”

“I’ll tell you something straight off. At the moment I’m not interested in being your permanent staff. After the contract, I could change my decision, subject to your performance.”

“All right,” Agatha said matter-of-factly. “Now let’s get down to minor details. Here’s our plan ...”

“Stop. I don’t want to know it. With fifty thousand francs as seed money for expenses and twenty-five thousand pounds advance, I can make my own plans. They remain more secure that way.”

“You mean you don’t trust us. Okay. But twenty-four hours before the hit, you present your plan to a jury.”

“That’s fair. It’s like the SAS. The patrol leader makes his plan, but gives verbal orders in the presence of his seniors.”

“That’s it.”

“The quality of a plan largely depends on the quality of the intelligence it’s based on. I have no intelligence structure.”

“You’ll have access to everything we have.”

“Liaison officer, handing/taking over drill for top-secret documents.”

“Officer Le Viallon with a chained briefcase and armed escort. Briefing in her flat.”

“Brilliant.”

“Why?”

“Simple and convenient.”

“During a random listening check, one of our satellites picked up a conversation between the Khan and one of his top advisors. It details the security precautions of his visit to Grenoble. It also constitutes a confession that will never get as far as a courtroom. You can listen to it.”

Agatha reached down and picked up her briefcase. She put it on the desk, flicked it open, and extracted a small tape recorder with a tape in it. She depressed the play button. Johnny listened intently to the conversation between Bushra Butt and the Khan.

“We already have the tentative plans from the bodyguard agency. And one of the Arab stars has been persuaded to keep us informed.”

“How did you manage that?”

“You’re not cleared to receive the information, but it was a smooth operation sub-contracted to the French DST – their counter-intelligence.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t try to suborn one of the ex-Légionnaires.”

“Very funny. You know as well as I do that Légionnaires don’t break a contract. Why do you think we chose you, Mr. Kilvington?”

“For my good looks. What’s your name?”

Agatha ignored the question. She extracted a slim file from her briefcase and slid it towards Johnny.

“Please read your contract.”

He was impressed. These people were thorough, and they thought of everything, including security. It

## BLOOD MONEY

was a contract between one John Dalrymple Kilvington-Beresford and Seagull Associates Limited, a company dealing with Security and Conflict registered in Luxembourg. J.D. Kilvington-Beresford's services were being hired for a four-week period of intensive research in risk assessment for a syndicate of international clients registered in the Seychelles. Seagull's bank account was in the Seychelles, and payment for services would be put into a numbered account (details in annex P) in the Canaries and one on the Isle of Man. J.D. Kilvington-Beresford understood that the contract involved taking a risk, and insurance was taken out with GA-Vox, France. His hundred thousand pounds were neatly distributed in a series of bonuses, payments, expenses and research endowments – one from the Reagan Foundation and another one from the Jimmy Carter Foundation.

There were two copies, and he read the second one as well. There was no trickery. Agatha slid a pen across the desk, a bright yellow Parker fountain pen. He signed both copies, gave one to Agatha, and folded his one neatly and put it in his jacket pocket.

Agatha handed him a small brown envelope.

“That's your expense money, plus your thirty-five thousand francs. It's off-the-record. Fifty thousand pounds. Your contract money will be paid into your accounts on schedule, and you'll receive confirmation. The advantage is, it's legally earned money, and you can spend it without any fear. Your trust and confidence in us are essential.”

“Until you bump me off to keep my mouth shut.”

“Mr. Kilvington,” she said patiently, “for an ex-SAS



man and Légionnaire, you've read too many cheap thrillers. If we get you bumped off to keep your mouth shut, we then need to have the hit man bumped off, and then have his terminator bumped off. D'you think we're gonna spend the rest of our intelligence careers doing that? You're more useful to us alive, and part of us. That's the best insurance we have, and you too."

"If I refuse to join you?"

She sighed.

"You're an intelligent man – honors graduate from Sandhurst and top of the class at Castelnaudary. I think you'll appreciate the advantages in joining us.

"I suggest you have a calm quiet evening and think everything over. Tomorrow afternoon Officer Le Viallon will bring you a briefcase full of files. You will memorize the data in them, and she will test you. And believe me, professionally, she's one of our best. She'll grill you on the information, then take the files back. In the twenty-four hours following the return of the documents, she will fire random questions at you. We want you to be sure of your intelligence. After that, we expect your plan. The subject is already in Paris."

After Johnny left the study, Agatha turned the lamp off, then switched the main light on. The priest's face stayed in the shadow. She waited.

"The man has no aura of inherent evil, but he is afraid he might be out of his depth. He is a very intelligent and courageous man, and he *fears* God. I am very tired now, in body and spirit. I shall confess to the Holy Father, and go into retreat for two weeks of fasting and meditation. God be with you."

## BLOOD MONEY

Johnny kissed Nathalie and secured his seat belt.

“The head-man is a woman. An American woman. Do you know her?”

Nathalie nodded.

“What’s her name?”

She threw back her head and laughed.

“You can call her Minnie Mouse. How’s that for a name?” He made a lecherous grab for her but she gunned the 205 and he missed, pressed back into his seat by the G-force of acceleration.

Ten minutes later Nathalie parked outside l’Auberge Joly.

“Hey, Minnie Mouse said to have a quiet evening.”

“That’s exactly what we’re gonna have. You can start by quietly using some of your expense money.”

“In that case, I get to choose. Turn the car ’round.”

“Where to?”

“I’ll let you know, love,” he commanded, very sure of himself.

“Okay, darling,” she murmured affectionately, and her mind flashed back to their encounter at the Gare de Lyon.

She had been given an errand to run by professor Dufour. A message had to be delivered to an agent in Lille. He was a liaison officer from Shin Bet, the Israeli military intelligence. The message was a single line from Chaucer, to be repeated in English to a sailor in a certain café at a certain hour. She was then to take the 3:00am train to Paris, and the morning TGV high-speed to Grenoble. In retrospect, it was obvious that the

Schengen Group had finely calculated Johnny's arrival at the Gare de Lyon to coincide with her presence, and she had not been told so that her surprise would be genuine. What the Group hadn't taken into account was her falling in love with Johnny so soon. They had estimated that if the operation rolled on a dynamic momentum and tied itself up in a few weeks, there would be no time for romance.

She had confessed her membership of the Group on the train. As the TGV surged forward at 200-plus miles per hour, she had taken Johnny's hand.

"Yes, I'm a member of an intelligence organization," she confessed in a voice that was too low to be heard by the other passengers, yet not a whisper. "But I'm just a pawn, Johnny. I only know one person, and I know of a couple of others I had to meet once. I'll arrange a meeting with the officer controlling this operation. You'll be told what they think is necessary. Then they'll make a proposal, which you'll reject or accept. Whatever your decision, now you've come into my life, I won't give you up without a fight."

"Darling, believe me, you won't have to fight very hard," Johnny reassured her. He was pleased to see the joy in her eyes, and how her face lit up. His brain was crystal clear now. The SAS and the Légion occasionally had a close working relationship with the intelligence organizations. When the French or the British required secure commandos, they used the Légion or SAS. Johnny had first-hand experience of their ruthlessness, and the cold-blooded deviousness they employed. It was a world of light and shadows in which black and white blurred into gray, and the moral

## BLOOD MONEY

line was a tortured zigzag. If he was being recruited by these powerful planetary forces whose mere existence could not even be acknowledged by a woman to her lover, he would have to work within the structure to protect himself against their lofty *raison d'état*. Nathalie's emotions were his sole protection.

"How did you get into this organization?"

"Just after my separation, I was on holiday in Guadeloupe. I accidentally helped an agent in trouble?"

"Accident?"

"Oh yes, Johnny. I was just a neurotic schoolteacher, of no apparent use to these people. Then they asked me if I could do something for them. I did, and I think it helped my mental state. I too, used to get a recurring nightmare. I haven't had it in years. They also sent me on a couple of courses."

"What sort of courses?"

"A commando course and a basic intelligence course," she said with pride.

He was impressed. This was getting better. The romance in their relationship would protect him. The courses she had done, combined with her intelligence experience, would ensure that the protection was efficient. For the first time he felt a tingle of optimism.

"I'm not trying to recruit you for a contract, but we don't hire and fire people like pawns. We leave that to the established intelligence organizations. We need you and nobody else, and you aren't expendable."

He had no doubt she believed what she said. But he doubted whether she was right. He took her hand and planted gentle little kisses over her beautiful face, then stroked the side of her neck. She sighed.

“Get me an urgent meeting with the head-man. I’ll handle the rest.”

“Yes, Johnny. As soon as we get to Grenoble,” she had promised.

At the Grenoble station, she had made a phone call. The rendezvous in one of the Chartreuse churches had already been arranged.

Johnny, too, had made a call. He had rung his mother, spoken a few brief words. Then he had talked to his father and brother. Just before Johnny and Nathalie got into the taxi, he had suddenly remembered that he wanted to tell his mother something. He had excused himself from Nathalie, kept her waiting in the taxi, and run to another phone box. This one had had a glass door. He had shut it and rung home. He had asked for his father. From a few innocent sounding sentences, his father had quickly grasped the fundamentals of his son’s predicament. He was a very well connected Chartered Accountant. He told Johnny to ring him the next day between twelve and one at The Crooked Billet, where he usually had lunch.

At Nathalie’s apartment, they showered, then made love. It was gentle, slow and enchanting. He made her float on a soft gossamer cloud, and little else mattered. They had a nap, cuddled naked like two spoons, then they dressed and went out. He bought her perfume from a little shop in a cobblestoned street in the center of Grenoble. She took him on an aimless wander of the shops. Arms around each other’s waists, they strolled happily with the silly look of young lovers.

## BLOOD MONEY

He chose a restaurant in the rue Saint Laurent, the old Sicilian quarter of Grenoble. Old men sat in old cafés and played dominoes with wine glasses at their side. He chose the little Café des Arts.

It was all low ceiling, smoky beams and dried flower arrangements with the odd scythe for decoration, and a little fireplace. It was a little silly, but then young love *is* silly. They held hands with a candle between them and basked in the affectionate smiles of the rotund chef. His ravioles de Royans were fresh, and the veal blanquette homemade served with *basmati* rice cooked in saffron. The chocolate mousse was rich and copious, the house wine earthy and robust, and the half-bottle of Champagne chilled to perfection and perfectly appropriate to the occasion. Charlie, the immigrant from Guadeloupe who sold roses in restaurants, was absolutely charmed by the full force of John's Beresford and Sandhurst grace. With perfect aplomb, John bought a rose each for the other two couples and the chef's wife, and the most perfect rose for Nathalie, with a generous tip for Charlie. There were little kisses and toasts all round, and Nathalie's heart filled with pride. Her *gentleman anglais!* They reached the apartment in a rosy haze.

Johnny took the flacon of Givenchy and gently sprayed the bed. Nathalie was touched, and pushed him gently on to it. She peeled his clothes off with tantalizing slowness, then her own, while he watched her with unabated lust. Then she gently straddled and pleased him until he arched his back and groaned

and his muscles turned to jelly and his breath came in spouts and he flopped inside her. She lay over him, her head on his chest, eyes wet. Then he turned her over.

Next day she was out at work. He walked over to the Grande Place, eyed a little fearfully by the young punks. There must have been talk about his fight. He had a heavy brunch of chicken couscous at the Carrefour supermarket cafeteria. At twelve thirty he rang The Crooked Billet from the soundproofed phone boxes of the post office. His father was in complete control of himself. He had activated the right contacts, and they would lend Johnny whatever support he required. He was given the name of a renowned Jewish Chartered Accountant and Financial Consultant in Grenoble, whose contacts were impeccable, and discretion guaranteed.

Nathalie now gunned the car out of the Auberge Joly. On the road back to Grenoble, he abruptly asked her to do a U-turn. The little red Fiat passed them by. The driver was a middle-aged woman in a natty yellow beret. Another kilometer of bends, and Johnny asked Nathalie to do another U-turn. This time the little red Fiat passed them again, and Johnny gave an up-yours sign. Nathalie was aghast.

“She’s ever so prissy!”

“So she *is* one of yours. Were you expecting it?”

“Sort of, but not really.”

“Okay. Now let’s go back to the Auberge. As soon as we get there, ring Minnie Mouse. Tell her the operation starts tomorrow when you get me the data to

## BLOOD MONEY

memorize. Until then it's rest and recreation. No playing silly buggers. I catch a tail on me, the tail gets crippled. No bugs either. The Auberge – is it booked?"

"No darling. Promise. And only I knew about it."

"Super!" he grinned. "Let's make a night of it. Plump pillows, goose-down duvets and country wallpaper." His leer was a promise that made her heart leap.

The white-haired lady at the desk sensed their excitement. She was pleased that her Auberge had been chosen to consummate their joy. Nathalie made a quick call on the phone, then came back and gave Johnny a wink. They had no luggage, but it didn't seem to bother the white-mustached *patron* who led them majestically up the well-worn oak staircase, which even had the proverbial creak. Their room was exactly as Johnny had predicted – except he'd forgotten to mention the view from the window daubed in impressionistic light at this time of twilight. An apple orchard fed by a small stream. A pair of sheep grazed nonchalantly in the orchard. As soon as the man left, Nathalie did a little twirl and a "wheee!"

He picked her up and twirled her, then threw her on the bed.

"Johnny, no! Please don't. After dinner. I don't want to go down to the dining room looking like a woman who's just made love. They'll notice."

He ignored her and kissed her deeply on the curve of her neck, where he knew it excited her. Her protests grew husky. He gently massaged the love spot between her legs and her whispers became encouraging endearments, then sighs.

He left her having a light nap. It was only seven-



fifteen. He was soundless going down the stairs. He dialed a number, then spoke briefly. No, he couldn't get down to Grenoble. Yes, if his interlocutor came up to the Auberge for dinner with his wife, who might be able to distract Nathalie, they could tie up a few minor details. Of course it was possible.

The lady at the desk told him the house menu for the evening. Coquille St Jacques, moelle à la Lyonnaise, salade dauphinoise, cheese, fruit, bavarois au chocolat, café au rhum. He expressed his approval, ordered flowers for their table and a bottle of Champagne to be chilled.

The sound of the door shutting woke her up.

"Johnny!" she reproached. "I feel sticky and sexy and I know it shows!"

"Am I complaining? I think it's exciting."

"No!" She evaded his grab with a laugh and slipped into the attached bathroom. The needle spray of the shower tingled her nipples. She threw her head back and shook her blonde hair.

He led her into the dining room on his arm. It was still obvious that she had been made love to expertly and well, and she looked absolutely radiant for it. Pride and love were stamped on his face. There was a young couple in a corner, and just after being served their Champagne *aperitifs*, a distinguished looking man with a silver mane followed a svelte brunette in her thirties wearing a simple black frock with a plunging neckline. They sat one table away from Johnny and Nathalie.

"*Excusez-moi – vous êtes anglais?*" a distinguished baritone interrupted.

Johnny turned and was treated to a full view of the

## BLOOD MONEY

lady's breasts. "Excuse my husband. He's an anglophile."

Johnny raised his glass.

"In that case, join us for a drink."

In a few minutes, they decided to have their tables joined. Monsieur and Madame Nessimi were a cultured couple known to the *patron*.

The service literally pampered them. While waiting for the main dish of moelle à la Lyonnaise, Madame Nessimi casually mentioned that the kitchens of the Auberge had a perfectly restored sixteenth-century oven with a door opening onto a patio next to the orchard. She suggested a tour, and the *patron* was more than willing to oblige. Mr Nessimi and Mr Kilvington politely declined.

Johnny's eyes nakedly caressed Nathalie's departing buttocks in the tight jeans, then both men lost their air of bonhomie, and talked in rapid, staccato sentences. Two pieces of paper were discreetly exchanged, a simple password established.

"Your recommendations are impeccable, monsieur. Just one thing. You may involve the *honorata socéta* if you wish, and I can arrange the contact for you. But if all you require is what you've told me, I am quite capable of providing it."

"Right then. If I ask more, the insertion of the word 'society' in the conversation, repeated twice, will clear you. Something practical. Would a flat fee of twenty five thousand francs be suitable?"

"With a bonus of five thousand at successful completion, it would be eminently suitable. And of course I have the fifteen thousand advance wired from

England. So you owe me ten thousand plus the bonus.”

Johnny bent as though to scratch his leg, and smoothly transferred a tightly folded wad of five hundred franc notes from his left sock into Mr Nessimi's right sock.

“You have just received ten thousand francs in your sock. That leaves the bonus which you will surely earn.”

With a courtly incline of his silver mane, Mr Nessimi affirmed John's confidence. “It is a pleasure to do business with an English gentleman.”

The ladies came back chatting like old friends, and then they were involved in one of those typically French evenings in which witty conversation flows back and forth over glasses of fine wine supported by refined compliments.

Next morning she dropped him off near the La Tronche hospital, from where he could take a tram to the Grande Place. He got off at the Maison du Tourisme, and picked up a few tourist brochures, plus two maps of Grenoble.

When she came back to the apartment in the afternoon, he was seated at the dining table. In front of him were the brochures and town maps. Four magic markers of different colors, a pencil sharpener, a folding antenna-type pointer, different size Post-its and four HB pencils with erasers were neatly arrayed before him, arranged by size from left to right. The partition wall between the dining and living area was about two and a half meters. The wallpaper was covered with a full-length stick-on sheet that could be used as a work board.

## BLOOD MONEY

Nathalie had a briefcase discreetly chained to her wrist. A casual observer would have missed it. They kissed, and she took a little electronic device the size of a pocket calculator out of her jeans pocket. She pressed a few numbers, releasing the electronic lock of the tungsten handcuff.

“Where’s your escort?”

“In a car outside.”

“Is he police or army?”

“Ex-gendarme. In such cases, we contract a private security company. Never the same company two times in a row. Simple and secure.”

“Good. I’ve got a sandwich for you, and a bowl of fruit salad. When can I start?”

Her heart ached to reach out and cuddle him. At the same time she admired his cold professionalism. She would give him no less.

“As soon as you’ve signed the secrecy documents. While I have lunch, you can start going through the files. You saw most of them yesterday.”

“Right.”

She produced a set of papers, with red *TRÈS SECRET DEFENSE* stamped diagonally to cover the entire writing. Johnny read carefully. In case of a breach, he would lose all residential and civil rights, which meant his only option would be the Légion. He knew where that would lead. Posting to the Third Foreign Regiment of Infantry in French Guyana, jungle patrol and a convenient accident would swiftly follow. He would, of course, be accorded a military burial. He signed with a flourish, and Nathalie put the papers in a compartment of the briefcase. She then took out a

series of files and spread them on the table in a certain order.

*“La bonne lecture!”* she said.

*“Merci, et bon appétit!”* he replied.

In the first half-hour, he pored over the files he'd been shown the day before yesterday. They convinced him once again of the immensity of the challenge posed by an ideological adversary, and the far-reaching consequences if the current battle was not denied him. Then he put them away. The file detailing the resources he could command was most interesting. They were practically unlimited, as long as they went through his field controller.

At some point, Nathalie had finished her sandwich and was quietly reading in the living room. The last file had a breakdown of Mohammed Kamal Khan's program in Grenoble. Johnny pulled it towards himself with interest. He read it with the total concentration taught at Sandhurst, similar to that of a yoga practitioner.

He read it twice, then sat and thought for about half an hour. He read it a third time, then jotted a few notes on a pad. Then he spread one of the maps out, and highlighted certain sections of it.

The Khan was now in Paris. He was giving his son and wife a dandy time around the shops and tourist attractions. They had two suites at the Ritz – one for the family, the other for the guards. His two Tarang guards, Ghazanfar and Dildar, looked like Gurkhas with a little more height. Efficient, ruthless, and hard as nails. They never left the Khan's side. If Rehana, his wife, wanted to take her son somewhere in the

## BLOOD MONEY

afternoon, she was accompanied by one or two of the ex-Légionnaires. Although as tough and efficient as their reputation, the ex-Légionnaires had no idea of the extent of any possible threat. They were alert, but a little bored. The Arab commandos were taking themselves a little more seriously than they should have, to the collective amusement of the Légionnaires who represented a smattering of European, Asian and African nationalities.

The important thing so far was that the Khan and the Mother-Son pair often became two different targets, one lightly and the other heavily guarded. Would this hold true in Grenoble?

During his week in Grenoble, the Khan had a busy schedule of meetings, visits, conferences and then dollars and cents meetings. The Mother-Son target would be excluded by definition, and the distribution of protection would be the same as now.

Something he'd read in the brochures niggled his mind.

He went through them. That was it. The motorway to Lyon passed by the West of the Bastille. Between the motorway and the Bastille was Grenoble's esplanade, where every spring a fair was held for four weeks. It was on now. It would be on next week. Which little boy would want to miss it? The best day would be Wednesday, when the Khan was scheduled to sign the papers formalizing the merger of the Karakorum Foundation and Clean-Alpes. A formal invitation from any one of the organizations involved in the setting-up of the merger should be enough to ensure the Prince's presence at the Esplanade. Yes, the Schengen Group

would arrange that.

For exploiting the soft target, which would expose the main target, Johnny had the germ of an idea. It had taken root, and would mature on its intrinsic dynamism. On no account must it depend on the Schengen Group's logistics. Otherwise the real plans he had meticulously started to lay would miscarry.

He spread out the pictures of Kemal, Rehana and the Tarang bodyguards. He stared at them, committing them to memory.

Johnny got up and started making coffee.

Nathalie looked up brightly from Ruthie Bolton's Southern Gothic, 'Gal'.

"Finished?" she inquired hopefully.

"For now. Let's have a cup of coffee, and I'll be ready for the inquisition some time after that."

While the percolator spluttered, Johnny started prowling around the living room in a peculiar way. He shook his head in negative response to Nathalie's raised eyebrows. Then he rose on his toes to look at the hanging light with fixed intensity.

Light dawned on her face. She hesitated for a millisecond, then her chin jutted out determinedly. She pointed to the telephone, then shook her finger from left to right to indicate that he wasn't supposed to go near it. He felt weak with relief inside. He had her. She had just chosen him over the Group, by indicating that the apartment was bugged, and that one of the bugs was in the receiver. She took him by the hand and led him to the bedroom, pointing out the wall-light. The second bug. She flushed the toilet, then whispered in his ear.

"The bathroom and loo are clean."

## BLOOD MONEY

He felt the excitement descend over him, but she held him urgently: "No, Johnny. I love you, and I've told you, but that's for our privacy. You've accepted a contract, and we're at work."

Suddenly embarrassed, he let go of her. For a professional who took pride in his detachment, he had just been shown up.

After coffee, he wrote furiously on sheets of foolscap paper, then abruptly got up, and padded over to Nathalie.

He handed her the sheets of paper, and went back to the table. After twenty minutes, she came over to him and gave a thumbs-up sign. His plan was foolproof, excellent, and she would go along with it. Her face told him everything, and she, in his eyes, saw his naked soul. In time, very shortly, he would say it.

"Right, I'm ready for the grilling."

She grilled him mercilessly, and without pity. With each question, his professional respect for her grew. She came back with questions she had asked earlier, following a pattern that Johnny, himself a trained interrogator, could not pinpoint. She knew she was good, knew he was impressed, and it excited her, more so because in the circumstances, she was inviolate. Professionalism was a veil whose sanctity he had to respect.

After an hour of grilling, they both felt it. Nathalie's nipples stood out prominently against the blouse, and her hard breathing caused her breasts to rise and fall.

Johnny showed a sheen of sweat on his upper lip.

"That's it for now, Johnny." She snapped her fingers. "Have you got a plan?"



“Most of it I’m keeping in my head,” he growled.

A look of understanding passed between them. She had just read the details of his plan and accepted everything. In the complicity against the Schengen Group’s mikes, she had just given him carte blanche over her life.

“What are you gonna present, then?”

“Nothing much. I need some minor logistics. I want Prince Rustam to be at the Esplanade Wednesday evening, just before sunset. I want a Met report for Wednesday. I want files on any Air Taxi helicopter pilots in the Grenoble area. Here’s a list for the rest of the stuff”

She scanned the list rapidly. He knew his stuff.

“Well done – you’ll get it all. Don’t you want a knife?”

“No. That’s personal. I’ll buy my own – when you take this homework back, I’ll nip over to the Grande Place. I saw a decent hunting and fishing shop with quality knives in the window.”

“Right. Your plan is, in effect, unknown to the Group. All you’ve implied is that you’re going to pull off a kidnapping at the Esplanade, which will be crowded chock-a-block with kids and families. The Prince will be guarded. Your brilliant plan implies a successful kidnapping, and eventual isolation of the primary target from its security cordon.”

“That’s it.” He had scribbled something on a piece of paper and now stuck it under her nose. She read it and nodded, her face determined. Suddenly, she reached over and pressed his hand. He was touched. Then her face assumed the professional mask. The tone became brisk again, almost shrill.

## BLOOD MONEY

“I have been ordered by my superiors to make you aware of certain facts ...

“Your entrance and exit from Chez Hans was recorded on video camera. There is also a neighbor’s affidavit.”

His face turned to stone.

“That’s not all. The fight with the punks was also recorded, and there are depositions from them.

“If you do not wish to reveal your plans, your desire for security will be respected. However, in that case, you alone bear responsibility for success. You are perfectly aware of its importance. You have accepted the contract. If it fails, the evidence on films and the depositions will be enough to warrant your arrest, and eventual shooting down in an attempt to escape.

“You see, there is no back-up plan – cannot be unless the Group know what *your* plan is.”

Nathalie concluded with a violent shake of her head and pleading eyes. He understood that she had not been part of the framing, and would not have approved of it, which is why she was excluded in the first place. He silently mouthed, “*I love you*” and her heart sang.

“Wilco: message received, understood and will be acted upon. But there *is* a back up – only thing is it’ll then have to be a dirty operation. A terminal bomb that takes out half the hotel and a few buildings next to it. An operation *à l’arabe!*” he concluded with a snort.

On the way across the overpasses that lead to the Grande Place, he noticed they had a team of three who weren’t being particularly discreet. Well, the threat he had been expecting had been delivered. He had known

there would be one, and was curious to learn what form it would take. Now he knew. These people didn't play games. The soft-pedaling was over, his plans were justified, and Nathalie was on his side. The one little problem was that he felt he was on Nathalie's side too. She was part of his life, and he wanted her to remain there. He had better admit it to himself. Yes, he had fallen in love and it wasn't a bad feeling, but he'd better make sure it didn't interfere with the operation, or else there would be no future for them.

He went past Mr Nessimi without a glance and entered the vast supermarket, pushing the shopping trolley. Three sharp turns and he was out of sight of his tail for a second. Next time the tail would accept it. He bought a few underclothes, coffee, sugar, three plastic mugs, and some salt. Nessimi passed by, pushing his own trolley. They locked eyes and understood. Another three rapid turns around the aisles, and the tail was out of sight for a few seconds, and Nessimi passed by, indicating with his eyes. Johnny picked up a packet of cream biscuits and smoothly inserted the envelope he found under it into the inside of his leather jacket. He had left a folded sheet of paper under the next biscuit tin. Nobody had noticed, and the tail was back. Just before he got out of the aisle, Johnny noticed Nessimi returning with the air of a shopper who had forgotten something on the list. Nessimi went to the biscuit section and picked up a tin of cream biscuits with evident relief. He also slipped a piece of paper into his inside pocket. Nobody noticed anything unusual.

When Nathalie returned, carrying the files of the Air Taxi pilots, Johnny was whistling a tune to himself and

## BLOOD MONEY

wrapping a rubber band around the hilt of a Camillus combat knife. Next to it was a Puma folding knife with a lock, and a whetstone. Both knives had blue-black blades, and looked businesslike. A cold chill went down her spine. He was enjoying it, and this was not a game. A family would be torn apart, a child taken from its mother, the father of a family maneuvered to a kill. She choked back the bile and busied herself making dinner. She had to steel herself against the grating sound of the blade passing over the whetstone to the background of Johnny's whistle. It had the dirge-like rhythm of a Légion war-chant.

Twice during the night she woke him up roughly, and barked questions in her random pattern. Each time his answers were on the mark, even when his eyes were bleary.

Next morning, he heard her leave early, then slept again. There was a note beside his bed.

"I did what you asked me to. I visited my parents. Had a lovely evening and photographed the plans. I'll be back with them developed, and the stuff you asked for. Destroy this note. I love you."

He stared at it for a long time. Then he went to the toilet bowl and slowly and deliberately ripped it up into little pieces. He pulled the chain with an abrupt movement. Then he went and looked again inside the envelope he had picked up from Nessimi. Everything seemed to be in order. Time to shave, shower, and have breakfast. Then back to the file of the Air Taxi pilot he had selected.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Albert Colin had served in the French Resistance as an adolescent courier. After the war, he went back to school, then sat for a minor civil service exam that allowed him to be a ticket inspector on the railway. He had spent thirty years traveling trains, and was due to retire. He had seen many changes. The Americans came with their sweets and chewing gum, followed by the Marshall plan which made France hum but also made her give up the colonial markets. The influx of cheap colored labor had never bothered him. It allowed the French to keep their hands in their pockets, but when this lot joined the suit and tie brigade, it seemed to break a natural law. Rich, colored visitors were even worse. They strutted around as though they'd conquered *la belle France*. It hurt more to see them being served by white people. Look at this family now. An arrogant Arab with his busty wife and little Fautleroy son surrounded by luggage and retainers and bodyguards! What was the world coming to! He locked eyes with the little boy and couldn't help smiling. In his gray suit and tie, with polished Oxfords, he looked every inch a *petit britannique*. The lava-stream of tourists and French travelers was viscous, and Colin quickly moved into it.

## BLOOD MONEY

Rustam's eyes shone. At last he would get on the famous bullet train. Paris had been wonderful. His parents often went out by themselves, and that was the best. His two guards, Luigi the Italian and Akio the Japanese, had a smattering of English. They took him to wonderful places like the Science Museum and Military Museum. They had both served in the French army, and had tales to tell which he found nearly as exciting as those of the Tarangs.

Rehana saw bra-less breasts and men's crotches clearly outlined. It renewed her contempt of Western society without giving up her envy for its affluence, institutions and services. The police were polite and so were taxi drivers. In some eyes she saw lust for her full figure, in others spite at her foreignness.

She and Kamal had fallen in love again. They had held hands and strolled, and bought each other all sorts of useless little things. The round of dinners and museums was heady, the three dinners with Kamal's contacts boring. Having to sit with those Parisian women in their plunging necklines, which Kamal only tried to avoid when he knew she was watching. They had made love every night, and at least she was satisfied on that score.

Ghazanfar and Dildar looked smart and tough in their jeans and leather jackets. They watched the crowd with the alertness of mountain eagles. Their orders were to trust nobody. They didn't. They had only left the Khan's side twice, at night. Highly expensive and skilled call girls with medical certificates had been brought to the hotel to service their needs.

The Légionnaires, they knew, were crack soldiers,

but they watched them all the same. So far everything seemed fine. The Arab commanders were different. They hadn't earned their spurs with the Légionnaires, a tribe apart. The two Tarangs and the Légionnaires treated each other with mutual respect, but treated the Arab commanders with subtle contempt and suspicion.

An entire first-class wagon had been reserved on the train, and Rustam was delighted to go up and down it, and then to the other wagons. Everybody was getting used to his increased independence. After all, the Khan reasoned, there was a threat of kidnapping in Pakistan, or perhaps Sicily, but here, in France, if his enemies made a move, *he* would be the obvious target. The speed, comfort and efficiency of the TGV high-speed held all five spellbound. The two Arabs felt jealous of the French techno-symbol, but the Légionnaires were proud.

At Grenoble station they were met by a representative of the Town Council, and the manager of the Park Hotel with a bevy of hostesses and bell-boys. There was a reporter accompanied by a photographer.

In the luxurious hotel suite, the Khan had a drink with the representative of the town council. The mayor expressed his compliments, and wished the Khan a pleasant stay. He would meet the mayor and the town council in session for lunch tomorrow. As a small courtesy, the Council was pleased to offer a discount card from the Chamber of Commerce, valid at certain shops. There was also an invitation to the Esplanade for Wednesday. Of course the Khan would be up to his neck in paperwork for the merger. But *Madame la*

## BLOOD MONEY

*princesse* and his *altesse* could go. On the basis of the invitation, they wouldn't have to pay at any of the rides, amusement stands, or even the eating stands.

The Khan was pleased, Rehana charmed, and Rustam felt excited.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

Gabriel Chevalier was in his early fifties. Thick set, with thinning hair and round features, he looked kindly. He had spent twenty years flying freight across Francophone Africa for SOCOTAO, Air France's African freight service. At forty-five, after his divorce he had decided to retire. Marriage and flying had been unhappy bedfellows. Civil life remained to be seen. His only daughter, fed up of parental rows and the constant moving from one expatriate base in Africa to another, had given up in disgust and emigrated to Canada as soon as she was eighteen. She was now a nurse, married to a full-blooded Mohawk Indian.

Retirement at forty on a full pension enabled Gaby, as he was known to his friends, to buy a small farmhouse in the Chartreuse massif near Voreppe, fifteen miles South of Grenoble. For the first five years he was pleased with his life. He raised geese and turkey for Christmas, and pruned a few fruit trees. He had given up on the cow, giving it to a neighboring farmer for free, and he could not be bothered to take care of a cat or dog. His occasional target practice with three rifles of different calibers succeeded in keeping the neighbors away. He thought that was how a man should live until he realized he was bored. He tried

## BLOOD MONEY

hang-gliding, but it was a little late in the day for that. Once he had a fight in a bar, but got both eyes blackened because he was getting on in years and was slow. Besides, he had never really liked violence, least of all during his national service in the Algerian war. The army had appreciated his low marks in A-level math and physics. He had soon become a co-pilot on a reconnaissance plane during the Algerian war, graduating to a helicopter, and eventually, with the rank of adjutant, warrant officer, to his own helicopter. His French but Algerian-born *pied noir* wife liked parties and entertainment and found her husband insufferably boring and the young fighter pilots incredibly handsome and exciting. By the time he learnt of this it was too late, and when he'd decided on divorce it made no difference to her because life had been a ball for forty years.

Four years ago, Gaby had at last realized what he really loved in life – flying a helicopter. His Range Rover was no good. It couldn't fly! He re-sat and passed a helicopter pilot's license with flying colors, liquidated his shares in Renault and Dassault, had a word with his bank manager, and bought a Lama chopper: 5-seater, 870 hp, speed 120-mph, range 350 miles. At twelve yards in length and nine feet in height, it was neither cumbersome nor too small for business. Gaby kept his Lama on the farm, and registered with the Chamber of Commerce as an Air Taxi service for businessmen. He was amazed how busy he suddenly became. Most of his trips involved ferrying businessmen – French and foreign – between Grenoble, Lyons, Geneva and Paris. Gaby was happy.

He shut down the geese and turkey operation, and between flights, kept the Lama in prime trim.

This afternoon he was expecting Lord Braithwaite, a British businessman who wanted to get to Lyon. He had insisted that he would come to the farm, from where they would take off. Curious, since most of his customers were picked up at the World Trade Center in Grenoble. However, Lord Braithwaite was the customer, and it was his money, and anyway, Gaby loved flying, so what was the big deal?

Lord Braithwaite would be accompanied by his secretary, probably a Madame Thatcher type chesty blonde with a bossy manner. Gaby didn't like women, hadn't tried men, but ... he had laid out some cakes and tea – the English liked it. He sat quietly enjoying the view. Milord would be here in a while.

Past Voreppe's dinky town hall, overlooking the confluence of two streams, the well-maintained secondary road wound up in a series of gentle bends to the village of Pommiers. Nathalie took the stolen BMW easily through the small village, then followed the tight curves of the mountain road for another few miles through thick forest. Five hundred yards above them, they could see the outline of a roof. She pulled in to the side of the narrow road, on the slope. Without a word, Johnny got out of the car and disappeared into the forest.

He ran easily, without any noise. The pine trees enveloped him in their primeval womb. He had a peculiar sense of comfort, running easily by himself in

## BLOOD MONEY

his jeans and leather jacket, pace attuned to the rhythm of a Légion war-chant. In five minutes he had his second wind. The forest was silent except for someone who knew it. He trod on a twig, jumped two yards to his left, rolled and came up with the knife in his hand. He counted up to five, then crawled behind a tree trunk in total silence. Counted another ten, threw a small pebble. Nothing. To be doubly sure he changed his approach azimuth by five hand degrees. Before moving on again he sheathed the knife. Nothing sillier than the fool who runs in a forest with a drawn knife, then trips on a root and stabs himself in the crotch.

The skyline was a hundred yards above him. He stopped next to a pine trunk. The forest was still. A bush stirred. It was the breeze, and he relaxed. The underbrush shook slightly, then rasped. A lizard or a viper. Only two yards away. A viper, and it disappeared deeper into the undergrowth. The skyline, quiet, with no menace. He waited, watched, body relaxed, mind on the edge of releasing adrenaline. Not yet. He walked ten paces left, stopped to listen. A dozen paces right, stopped to listen. Twenty five paces straight, lying-loading position. Startled a lizard, kept still. Then he walked up slowly and took a lying-loading position behind the last pine.

A sagging fence with three strands of simple wire separated the property from the forest. Behind a half-acre of meadow was the farmhouse – typical regional plaster, double storied, in good condition, well-kept. Enormous barn to the side, which was probably the hanger. One window facing the meadow, probably the kitchen. Direct approach negative. Dead ground left

and right. Right-hand dead ground open to main entrance. Take left hand dead ground. Good. No dogs. Alarms? He studied the window and the edges of the barn with a pair of folding binoculars. No apparent alarms. The wire fence was clean. A kestrel soared on an air-stream. A parascender or hang-glider was a speck in the distance. He carefully moved left – slowly, silently, bringing all his field-craft into play. He obtained the dead ground. Gave three clicks on the small wireless transmitter in his inside pocket. Nathalie would receive them and know exactly what to do. Faith and love.

Start-line last check. Drills important. Don't ignore drill. Sweat saves blood. *Okay!* .375 snug in the shoulder holster. Combat knife in place. A bit of dry earth rubbed on the palms kept the hands from getting sweaty. Sweaty palms slip guns and knives out of hands. He slipped the dark-blue silk ski-mask over his face. Point of no return. Innocent hikers could go around with knives, but not with ski-masks covering their faces when there was no snow.

One easy step and he was over the wire and sprinting at an angle to the blind wall. Ten feet from it he went into the lying-loading position without breaking sequence, then on one knee against the wall. No alarms played their electronic cacophony. The engine of the BMW was vaguely audible on the clear pine-scented Chartreuse air. He allowed his body rhythm to guide his noiseless slither until he was next to the window. Stopped. Total silence. End of protection from dead ground. The knife silently slid into his hand. His grip was warm and dry, the handle comforting. Single-

## BLOOD MONEY

eye surveillance with attention to enemy's line of vision based on his state of alertness. He gave four clicks on the wireless. The BMW's engine was loud and clear and rushing towards the farm.

Gaby sat at the kitchen table in gray cotton trousers and a light green jumper. There was a good movie on in town. An action movie with Mel Gibson. He'd be able to make the late show. He heard a car engine coming up the hill to the farm. An expensive, well-tuned engine. Well, *Milord* would come in no less. The tires crunched over the gravel and the horn started blowing. The sharp and efficient crack of the knife blade against the window catch was drowned by the indecency of the klaxon. Gaby jumped up from the chair to go out, his back to the window. There was a loud thump behind him and he was in mid-turn when a knee solidly jammed his kidney and simultaneous pressure on a fistful of hair jerked his head back and bared his throat to the knife blade. Being a reasonably intelligent person with a flying background, Gaby went completely still. He was also very frightened. The klaxon was silent and he could hear nothing except the ominous crunch of footsteps on gravel. His captor held him silently, like a lamb ready for a Semitic sacrifice.

*"Allah Akbar!"* the woman cried sharply, the battle-cry of Medieval fundamentalism in odd contrast with her blue business suit, ski mask and briefcase. *"Mort aux chiens chrétiens!"*

Gaby's eyes bugged in terror. He wasn't a Christian dog – he was a committed atheist. The tendons of his

neck outlined themselves starkly against the knife blade.

The woman came close and spat in his face.

“Degenerate and decadent animal. Distilled camel urine, we are the Guardians of Allah. We despise you.”

She punched him in the belly. He wanted to double up, but the pressure on his kidney and hair, and the feel of the cold blade only caused unintelligible sounds to be choked in his throat.

“Your soft belly is full of goat’s droppings, and the Revolution will slit it.”

She reached under her short skirt and pulled out a flick-knife. Gaby was in no state to appreciate the magnificence of her thighs. His eyes were transfixed on the stiletto blade that opened with a sharp click. It came nearer. Caressed him just under the right eyeball, and he nearly fainted with fright. In a swift movement the woman took the blade down, pulled his shirt up, and inserted the tip in his bare navel. Just enough for him to feel it.

“I would like to pierce this bleached watermelon,” she whispered.

Gaby became a dead weight in Johnny’s hand, but was still conscious. Johnny signaled to Nathalie with his eyes.

“Fatima, slit his trousers instead.”

Gaby’s trousers accorded to his ankles in a hiss of fabric. His white paunch and hairless legs looked pathetic in the beach-boy’s briefs. Johnny angled a chair with his foot and seated Gaby on it, the knife still at his throat.

Nathalie pulled his arms around the back of the

## BLOOD MONEY

chair, then expertly tied the thumbs. Johnny removed the knife from Gaby's throat, and exchanged it for the .375. The black hole staring at Gaby took on the dimensions of a 155mm artillery piece.

"What do you want ..."

Johnny slapped him hard in the face. Then he slapped him again.

"Shut up, you barking, dog. The servants of Allah haven't allowed you to speak yet. Fatima!"

"I hear you, Abdul the Man-eater!"

"Guard the camel dung!"

She clicked the briefcase open with a well-practiced gesture and pointed another .357 at Gaby. Johnny holstered his gun, and the knife was back. Using a Kleenex, he pulled Gaby's little briefs down. The humiliation was complete. His flaccid penis seemed to shrink even further.

"Uncircumcised heathen, like the rest of your race. Do you value that little button between your fat thighs?"

"Yes, Abdul the Man-eater."

If Gaby had been a little less frightened, he might actually have wondered which male parts the Man-eater found tastiest.

"And do you value this house, which could easily be flattened with a few pounds of *plastique*?"

"Yes, *milord*," an instinctive reaction to Johnny's English accent.

"I converted the Great Abdul in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon. He *is*, in fact an English lord – but he has seen the true light," Fatima swiftly interjected.

Gaby felt a fresh stab of fear at the mention of Bekaa valley. He suddenly realized that he had never



actually faced mortal danger.

“You don’t fancy going to prison, do you?” Johnny pleasantly inquired.

Gaby vehemently shook his head in the negative.

“For the loan on your helicopter, you falsely declared your income. It would bring the Inland Revenue and the bank on your fat wobbly arse faster than you can land a Lama.”

“Yes, milord Abdul.”

Nathalie, with meticulously rehearsed timing, passed over a folder.

“Read this, you thief!”

Gaby had no need to. The documents clearly showed that he had earned a sizeable bonus in Algeria. The sum resurfaced as his deposit on the farm. To save taxes, he had paid the seller cash under the table. The sale price clearly showed an undervalued house, and the missing and resurfacing figures corresponded perfectly. Gaby’s defeat was utter and total.

Johnny sat on a chair and elegantly crossed his legs. With a graceful desert gesture, he bade Fatima be seated.

“There are several options open to us. We may just kill you, and save you from further sin. We could castrate you, freeing you from sexual fantasies. We could take you up in your helicopter, and throw you down just as your farmhouse explodes. What would you prefer?”

“Neither, milord Abdul! What do I have to do to live?”

Johnny and Nathalie exchanged glances.

“He would like to live, oh Abdul the Man-eater!”

“It would appear so, oh pious Fatima!”

## BLOOD MONEY

Johnny suddenly leapt on Gaby and twisted his nose hard. "Life is precious, isn't it?" he taunted in a venomous hiss. His knife-blade tickled Gaby's paunch, then contemptuously raised his penis and let it fall.

"You have been honored by the Guardians, cur! Do you accept the honor?"

"Yes milord Abdul," Gaby nodded his head earnestly.

"Guardians of the Revolution need your helicopter, and you with it. Do as we say, and you get twice your fee. Betray us, and you die a horrible death. Others from the sand will come to give you your just deserts, that your soul may roast in hell forever.

"We will leave a bomb in your wretched farmhouse, which can be detonated at any time by a remote control device. The papers proving your theft of state funds are with other Guardians of the Revolution.

"We have brought two parachutes. If you misbehave in the helicopter, we will slit your throat in the name of the Revolution, and jump out of your wretched machine. But for the glory of the Revolution, we don't care about our lives. Is that clear?"

"Yes, milord Abdul."

"Now we have work to do. You will help us."

"Yes milord Abdul."

The almost sheer rock face rose up a couple of hundred feet, and part of the old Fort Rabot looked sternly down at the two hectares of Esplanade. Giant Ferris wheels circled high overhead, filled with screaming children and adults.

The smell of grilling sausages and mustard filled the air. Decorated stands offered caramelized apples and cotton candy. Shooting galleries catering to a smattering of aging fathers trying to impress their families with a non-existent shooting ability. Trout-fishing for children, and a “Canadian bob-sleigh” ride that mainly had a clientele of teenage lads hoping to impress their girlfriends and get off with them. There were people everywhere, including the retired, brainwashed by chat shows to believe that it was the right thing to go to such places when they really wanted to prepare for death with dignity. Aimless wanderers with no money rubbed shoulders with well-heeled parents ambitiously giving their children a good time. There was a mini-circus, and two fortune-tellers’ booths. An enormous trailer said “Snake-Show!” Even at fifty yards, the fetid smell of reptiles overrode that of grilled meat. The music was deafening – a cacophonous competition between Michael Jackson, two French rock groups and Madonna. It was hard to talk in the noise. Smiles floated from one face to another.

Outside the train of horrors, Rehana waited with a photographer in attendance from the Dauphine Libéré, the local paper. Luigi, the Italian Légionnaire, alertly scanned the crowd, missing nothing. A young couple had been following them. Luigi guessed they were plainclothes cops from the local *brigade criminelle*, and the photographer confirmed as much. Some people eyed Rehana curiously, most were too busy having fun to bother about her. Rustom should be coming out soon. He had gone into the train of horrors with Aiko,

## BLOOD MONEY

the Japanese Légionnaire.

Rehana was pleased. She had gone on a shopping spree this morning, unsparingly using the complimentary discount card presented by the Chamber of Commerce. She had acquired a sizeable number of expensive and mostly useless possessions, which would considerably enhance her status within her social circle in Pakistan and Gunda. Lunch with Kamal and other leaders of Clean-Alpes had been in Hotel Lesdiguières, which was also the training school for waiters and chefs. The quality of the white-gloved and liveried service rivaled Buckingham Palace where she and Kamal had been invited during their honeymoon, along with the Sultan of Brunei. After lunch was the finalization of the merger, and, of course, she and Rustam had the invitation from the Council to visit the Esplanade. They were treated like royalty at every stand. Tarang to the core, her son could have run the shooting gallery into bankruptcy. She liked France. Always had. The French were so different from the cold-blooded English. Their food was delicious, their clothes elegant, and they loved life. A hospitable, generous and civilized people.

A helicopter passed low. Not everyone noticed at first, because of the noise. But then on the third pass, eyes strained upwards. A streamer behind the helicopter said "VIVE LES CLOWNS." The helicopter itself had been decorated to look like a clown. The striped hat, bulbous nose and thick made up smile were painted or stuck on both sides. It was something so different that

even some of the blaring music came down in volume.

The helicopter suddenly went into a hovering position. A clown with Mickey Mouse ears slowly descended head-first. Another clown manipulated the winch from the doorway of the chopper. A roar went up from the crowd. Children screamed with pleasure “MICKAY - MICKAY - OUAIS! OUAIS!”

The Mickey-clown pretended to fall. The crowd gasped. He straightened himself, and there was a collective sigh of relief. He touched his ears and sirens went off. The crowd roared their approval. The helicopter did two circles while the clown threw confetti over their heads. The silly smile was a fixed mask. He held everybody’s attention, and had achieved perfect rapport with the crowd. Even the loud music had been turned off in deference to this surprise.

The helicopter held steady again. The clown performed a series of whirls and loops that held the crowd transfixed. He spread his arms wide for applause. It was deafening when it came.

“And now, a special act with a volunteer chosen by MICKAY MAGIQUE!” His assistant’s feminine voice announced from a mike in the helicopter.

Rustam had come out of the train of horrors with a heart thumping and eyes round with excitement. Maybe they would have something like this in Gunda one day, but he doubted it. And to top the excitement, there was a Mickey Mouse clown doing absolutely fantastic stunts suspended from a helicopter made up to look like a flying clown float. The loops and whirls were gee-whiz! Did he have to be a prince?

Even Aiko’s trained eyes were fixed upwards. The

## BLOOD MONEY

announcement that Mickey-Magique needed a volunteer even had some adults tingling with anticipation. The helicopter started losing height until it was only fifty feet above the spectators. The pilot couldn't be seen but the assistant clown next to the winch waved to the crowd. Then she took a shotgun and pointed it at the crowd. The two Légionnaires and detectives tensed to leap and cover their charges with their bodies but the clown was faster. Both barrels exploded at the crowd. There were two high-pitched screams of fear. Pink clouds floated over the crowds and perfume assailed their nostrils. The shotgun had been a perfume dispenser and the crowd laughed as one. A lot of people felt a little foolish, but none more than the detectives and Légionnaires. Luigi and Aiko exchanged shrugs. The clown once again spread his arms wide. His assistant winched him down. There was a steady, deafening applause. Rehana and Rustam clapped 'til their palms hurt.

The clown descended majestically, with his assistant warning "*Reculez – move back.*"

Reluctantly but dutifully, the crowd parted until a semicircle of open space was made for him. He landed only a yard in front of Rustam. The lad waited with bated breath. The clown turned around to look at the others, and Rustam's heart sank. Just then, Luigi seemed to come out of his stupor. Something was wrong – *but what?* He half-turned to check angles, exits, entrances – corridors of fire, cover, dead ground, his eyes flicking like a snake's tongue.

The clown raised his arms and crossed his wrists in a signal. In a single blurring movement he grabbed

Rustam by the waist and hugged him. Even before his embrace was complete, he was being winched up at an alarming speed.

*That was it – the puttana clown*, Luigi cursed. In a single bound he was under the rising clown. He leapt up like a stag but only managed to scrape the clown's shoes and then it was too late. He held his head in his hands. Aiko muttered guttural curses in Japanese, his eyes red. People in the crowd couldn't understand the fuss. A volunteer had been chosen. It was time to wait for the next act.

*The lad isn't in a harness!* Luigi's brain staccatoed in a mantra and he knew the anomaly that had alerted his instincts. Rehana put her hand on his shoulder. He looked into her eyes and only saw the pride and joy of a mother whose son has been chosen by a clown to assist him!

*"Madame la Princesse,"* Luigi said in a tortured voice, "we have failed you. The Prince is not in a harness. He's in mortal danger. It's kidnapping!"

Rehana gasped and the shock hit her squarely in the gut.

"Rustam!" she choked.

He was a few feet below the hovering helicopter, held in the clown's arms, trying to be brave. Even a slight accident could send him crashing to his death, his brains dashed out. The detectives suddenly understood what was happening. The red-haired one with a pug nose panicked. He drew a handgun from a shoulder holster and started aiming upwards.

Rehana reacted like a daughter of the Karakorums. She grabbed the detective's wrist and deflected his

## BLOOD MONEY

aim. The shot went wild, and then Aiko had him in a choke hold. The crowd screamed. There was confusion in the ranks. The policewoman jumped onto a cotton candy stand.

“Stay calm, everybody stay calm,” she screamed. The crowd seemed to steady, but on a thin strand. A little push, and there would be a stampede.

Above their heads, the clown and Rustam were swallowed up by the helicopter. It turned slowly, then rose. Rehana gave a high-pitched wail, and the woman went to her side. She was pushed away with a curse. Luigi separated Aiko before he could put pressure on the detective’s carotid. The Japanese’s obsidian eyes were blank – dull, and ready for the kill.

“No Aiko. No.”

Aiko let go and shook his head violently, like a dog coming out of water.

“Aiko, get the car and try and follow the chopper.”

Aiko disappeared at the double into the crowd that parted fearfully.

“You,” Luigi ordered the confused detective. “Get a hold on yourself and use your radio. Ask the prefect to call up the Gendarmerie helicopters and the air force. Move your ass.”

The detective took out his portable and diligently started repeating a pre-arranged code word for just such an eventuality.

Luigi ran to the policewoman.

“Double up to the entrance. Tell the private security guards to shut the gates. Nobody comes in. Nobody goes out.”

The press photographer ran up to him.



“I got a picture.”

“Good work. Give it to the police when they get here.”

Privately, he had doubts of its usefulness. It would only show two clowns and a disguised helicopter. He jumped onto the stand vacated by the policewoman. At least she had kept her head.

Luigi spoke to the crowd calmly. His tone was soothing, and his natural Italian charm had its effect.

“Stay here, walk around, please wait for the police. The lad is a visiting prince. This is a serious *raison d'état*.”

Slowly, the crowd started milling around, muttering to themselves in awe at the Hollywood scene that had been played out with their passive and unwilling participation. A couple of women had tears in their eyes. To wrench a child away from its mother. What manner of men were they, these terrorists? It could as easily have been a bomb that would have blown them to bits.

Rehana stood stone-faced, not quite in shock, just fighting inside herself for control. *I don't want these decadent swine to see me break down.* Luigi stood by her, eyes downcast. An elegantly dressed middle-aged lady approached Rehana. Luigi waved her away but she whispered: “I'm a doctor.”

Luigi nodded and replied: “She speaks a little French, but good English.”

“I *am* English,” the lady replied.

Rehana let the lady lead her to a space behind the cotton candy stand. The gypsy proprietor rushed over with two folding chairs. Of a warrior race inured to the

## BLOOD MONEY

importance of the family, his face was a furious mask in reaction to what had happened.

“They will be caught, Madame, and punished,” he promised. “Here, drink this.” He offered her a glass of Coca-Cola.

“No thank you,” Rehana replied regally. *Kamal, your intrigues have caused them to take my son away.*

“In the hours or days to come, you will need your brain and your health. I’m a doctor. Drink,” the middle-aged English lady urged.

Rehana acquiesced and accepted.

The Prefect of Grenoble was on the phone to the Interior Minister. Actually, it was the other way round. Most of the Prefect’s conversation consisted of “*Oui monsieur le ministre*” or “*Non monsieur le ministre.*” The simple black telephone that was a direct line to the *Chef de Réseau* – Field Director of the DST – Direction de Surveillance du Territoire – started blinking.

“Please hold on a second, *monsieur le ministre*, the DST’s Field Director is on the hot line,” he said with a sinking feeling in the pit of his gut. “It could concern you too.”

The prefect took the news from the DST with outward calm. He was an ENARQUE from the élite Ecole Nationale d’Administration, the French establishment that produces the mandarins of the civil service. Poise had been drilled into him.

The minister had no such background. He had come up the hard way through the gutter-stab atmosphere of backroom politics. His Marseilles accent exploded in

the prefect's ear.

"*Bordel de merde!* The Khan's little brat kidnapped? There'll be hell to pay. It was your responsibility ... yes. ... of course. I'll get the air force out. You get the Gendarmes moving in their helicopters, although by this time they've probably ditched the chopper. And I want somebody's ass!"

Two seconds after the regional commander of the Gendarmerie put the phone down, sirens blared. Three seconds after that, two helicopters with crack gendarmes from the SWAT team took off. They were armed to the teeth and thirsting for blood.

Two minutes' flying time from Grenoble, two mirage fighter aircraft were on a routine flight. They were part of the élite French *Patrouille de France* that identified France's permanent strategic air command. The pilots received a series of terse instructions. Screaming through the atmosphere at 2,000 miles an hour, they gracefully veered their thirteen and half ton machines in the direction of Grenoble.

Led by the prefect's car with the tricolor fluttering, the police came in a comical cavalcade, as they are prone to do the world over once the horse has flown the stable. They harassed the public, asked pointless questions, and successfully got in each other's way. Luigi eyed them with as much contempt as he felt for himself, which was considerable. The English doctor had managed to start a quiet conversation with

## BLOOD MONEY

Rehana. Except for occasionally stumbling over a word, Rehana maintained the composure of royalty.

The room was soundproofed to cut distraction and allow the coterie of powerful decision makers to get on with arranging other people's lives without their knowledge. The lawyers had had a harrowing six months, but at last a draft of the merger was ready, and each of the eight men and four women around the gleaming conference table had a copy. They all looked relaxed and well fed. Lunch at the Hotel Lesdiguières had been irreproachable. The atmosphere now was right for examining the draft. Today would be perfunctory, and after office hours the members would look at it in detail with their advisors. If there was nothing untoward, they would exchange views on it tomorrow, and sign it in the presence of the press the following day.

There was a discreet knock on the door. Some of those present frowned with annoyance, others were on the alert. This could only be an emergency.

"Come in," the Chairman of Clean-Alpes called.

His own executive secretary, a middle-aged Swiss so discreet as to be almost invisible, became the sudden focus of attention. His face had whitened beyond its usual pallor. He shut the door behind him, and laid a note in front of his master. He left as discreetly as he had entered, but left uneasiness in his wake.

The Chairman read the note and paled. In total silence he passed the note to the Khan. Kemal Khan

read it and the last vestiges of any expression left his face. A blank cloud descended over it while his brain churned molten lava. He nodded to the Chairman, who rose from his chair.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I have news of the gravest importance. The only son and heir of our associate, his Highness the Khan of Gunda, has been kidnapped by terrorists.”

A suppressed gasp rippled across the table.

“I propose we suspend this meeting,” a gravelly Texas drawl suggested, “and that we do not reconvene until the affair is settled, and pit all our resources – public and private – to bring this tragedy to a happy conclusion.”

The speaker’s voice was clear and determined. There were nods of agreement. The meeting broke up with handshakes and shoulder squeezes. The men and women in this august gathering were too experienced, too practical to waste the Khan’s time in establishing their sympathy.

A police car with a motorcycle escort sped the Khan to the Esplanade. *Rehana!* It was war and they were front-line soldiers and his son was a warrior but *Rehana* – he had to face her! His son had been kidnapped and he was a father and war be damned – *oh Allah help me and save my son’s life WHOARETHEY?*

Ghazanfar and Dildar sat stonily on each side of the Khan. They had nothing to say. They awaited the orders of their liege lord. One small sign, and they would take this town apart – kill, kidnap, torture – do what was necessary to bring the heir back to his rightful

## BLOOD MONEY

place. This heathen country with its decadent ways had allowed this terrible thing to happen.

Where was their science and technology now? According to the code of the Karakorums, the host paid with his life if his guest came to harm. At the right time, in the right way, their liege lord would give the sign. Then some people would die to avenge honor. Who would be chosen to exact the vengeance?

Preceded by his two bodyguards, the Khan of Gunda strode through the crowds milling around the Esplanade. The music was back on, but the gaiety was muted. Behind the Khan there was a phalanx of police officials and local functionaries.

Rehana saw him coming and steeled herself. This despicable crowd must not see their divisions, their recriminations or their sorrow. They embraced lightly and he whispered to her blank-faced: "We are front-line soldiers, and I took the decision to bring Rustam. Now it is in Allah's hands."

"Yes, because ours have proved to be incompetent."

The words were like a slap in the Khan's face. Her eyes spoke volumes with complete clarity. They had always been united in their vision of the destiny of Islam. They had divergent opinions on the methods to be employed. He knew at this moment, more than ever, that his methods were being held up to question. Rehana saw the loss of her son as the direct consequence of the Khan's ambitions – no more, no less. Also as a failure of the *Halqa's* doctrine.

A senior civil servant from the prefecture made his way to Rehana's side, eyeing the Englishwoman curiously.

“*Madame la Princesse*, France is desolate at your loss. The Gendarmerie helicopters are in the air, a police dragnet will be cast the length and breadth of France. Even the Air Force has fighter planes in the air. The Pakistan Embassy has been informed. His excellence the Ambassador of Pakistan, your cousin, will be here within two hours on a military flight especially put at his disposal.”

“The State of Gunda is confident that France will spare no effort to restitute its honor,” the Khan of Gunda quietly replied, forestalling Rehana’s response.

The civil servant recoiled inwardly at the absence of any expression in the Khan’s eyes. It reminded him of a Karakorum viper he had seen at the Paris zoo when he was on a school trip.

Aiko came running up. He ignored the Khan, his employer, and went straight up to Rehana. He looked crestfallen.

“The car chase did little good, your Highness. The pilot flew high, then low, then disappeared over an escarpment. When I topped the escarpment a few minutes later, the sky was clear.”

Two French Air force Mirages bansheed low over the hills and all heads turned up.

“They might have a better chance,” Aiko murmured enviously.

The bodyguards’ eyes were flat. They stroked Aiko and Luigi. Their prince had been a trust in the hands of these ‘elite’ mercenaries.

Rehana looked from her husband to Aiko, then back

## BLOOD MONEY

again. "Where is my son?" she whispered fiercely.

The Englishwoman took her hand and gently squeezed it.

As soon as Rustam was safely winched in, Gaby rose from his hover. He then executed a perfect turn and flew just below the escarpment at an almost leisurely speed, unnoticed by the traffic on the busy motorway almost directly below.

Before Rustam had a chance to recover from the heady thrill of having been winched up without a harness and start wondering about the stunt he was meant to participate in, his eyes and mouth had been taped and he was trussed up. Johnny did it himself, ensuring that the lad's circulation was in working order, but at the same time the supple limbs would be unable to slip through the nylon cord. Nathalie might have left a little more play than was necessary. Even through their clown's costumes, he sensed her distaste at what they had just done. His concentration on the job at hand was total.

He glanced back, and saw a car detach itself from the car park. It started racing in their direction. Little good it would do.

Gaby licked his lips. He saw prison bars in a flash of vivid imagination, then got a hold on himself. They were absolutely crazy, these Allah freaks, bringing their war to France. If they wanted to do a *borde!*, their own deserts were big enough.

As instructed and planned, he hopped over the escarpment, then slid into a narrow valley. Flying at a



hundred and fifty feet now, there was only a scant few yards' clearance on either side. One thing about Gaby – he loved flying and was good at it. For the next two minutes he followed the tortured curves of the valley, then hopped another escarpment and entered another narrow valley. One minute after entering the valley, he found the little plateau perched on the edge of a cliff. Less plateau and more platform, it was a sweet meadow with the scent of flowers. He cut the engine and they were engulfed in silence and pollution-free air. On the opposite surface a stag bounded from one rock to another, then disappeared into the green richness of the pine forest. Far away, two wild boars engaged in mortal combat, their primeval grunts of bloodlust filtering down the silence. Johnny and Nathalie jumped lightly down. Gaby noticed that they were back in their normal clothes including the ski masks.

In total silence they took off the stick-ons that had turned Gaby's helicopter into a float. Rustam's eyes were fearful but the innate pluckiness was hard to miss. The lad had hold of his nerve. Gaby felt a little sick. They had dragged him into a kidnapping, and would surely kill him. But they had promised they wouldn't, if he cooperated. *Putain de merde! Quel couillon!*

In less than half a minute they were airborne again. Five minutes after that they rolled the helicopter into Gaby's barn. Johnny and Nathalie had just shut the barn doors when the two Mirages shrieked overhead, breaking the sound barrier in a double bang that was almost a salute. Johnny and Nathalie exchanged glances.

"That was the Air Force. Probably looking for us!"

## BLOOD MONEY

*“Ta gueule, ordure!”* Johnny snapped at him, aiming a light kick at his shins. “You have been chosen by the Revolution. Feel honored.”

Gaby didn't. He just felt very vulnerable.

They waited five minutes, which was wise, because two Gendarmerie helicopters of the Brigade d'Intervention – crack anti-terrorist troops – passed over the next valley. Gaby had a quick fantasy of those tough gendarmes abseiling down in a lightening move while he tackled Abdul the Man-eater. The fantasy evaporated as quickly as it had appeared.

Johnny looked out of the hangar. All clear.

“Get the traitor's son,” he ordered Nathalie.

“Up, boy.” Her voice had the ring of command but her hands were gentle as she raised Rustam to his feet. Abdul wrapped a blanket around the lad.

“Don't panic,” Johnny cautioned.

He picked up the lad like a baby, and snuggled his face into the blanket. It would be enough to prevent the ski mask from being noticed if there were watchers overhead or stray hikers around. Nathalie in the rear would take the ski mask off, and put it back on as soon as they entered the house.

Inside his house, Gaby was locked into his bedroom and told to wait. Johnny put Rustam on a chair. The lad still held onto his nerve, but it could go very quickly.

“We are the Guardians of the Revolution. We serve Allah, and your father is a traitor. We have also captured your mother. Do you love her?”

He nodded vehemently.

“Do you want her hurt – or maybe killed?”

Rustam shook his head again.

“Good. At this moment your mother is in a cave in the mountains. She is being guarded by heroic Mujahideen of the Revolution who care nothing for their lives. Look at this.”

Johnny thrust a small wireless set under Rustam’s nose.

“Do you know what this is?”

Earnest nod. Moisture at the corner of his eyes. *Better hurry up and get this over with before he bursts into tears.*

“If I transmit a secret code on this wireless, your mother will be killed for the glory of the Revolution. If you don’t do exactly as Fatima and I say, I will transmit the code. Do you understand?”

Rustam nodded. Two tears rolled down his cheeks. Johnny left the room.

Nathalie removed the tape from Rustam’s mouth, and untied his hands.

“Here, drink this,” she offered him a glass of water.

Rustam drank gratefully.

“Do exactly as Abdul the Man-eater says, and your mother will live, and so will you.”

“My father is not a traitor,” he blurted.

“Hush,” she cautioned. “Don’t let Abdul hear that, or I will not be able to protect you.”

The boy nodded gratefully.

Johnny’s Sandhurst and SAS training had worked. *La magouille anglaise*, she thought to herself admiringly. As Abdul, Johnny had played the baddie. She had now formed collusion with the lad. Between

## BLOOD MONEY

this alliance, fear for his mother's life, and fear of Abdul, he would be obedient for the next thirty-six hours. After that it wouldn't matter anyway, one way or the other.

Johnny stood over Gaby.

"Repeat the instructions," he ordered.

"One hour after you have gone, I'll fax you a communiqué to all the major press agencies. Their numbers are on top of the communiqué. After that I'll ring the police. When they come, I'll tell them the truth."

"And when they ask why you agreed to delay for an hour, what will you say?"

"That I was scared!"

"Will you tell them about the money we're paying you for your cooperation?"

"No!"

"How will you show it on your tax declaration?"

"I won't! I ..."

There was a sharp click in Johnny's trousers pocket. His hand emerged to show Gaby a small tape recorder. Gaby paled at its sight. He knew that Abdul the Man-eater had neatly trapped him. Between the documents the Guardians of the Revolution had somehow obtained, and the tape-recording admitting to receiving money from a terrorist organization in return for cooperating in the kidnapping of a minor, he faced prison for life. If he somehow missed that, the Guardians would blow up his house with him in it.

"Read the communiqué!" Johnny ordered, to bring Gaby back under control. Too much fear would lead to panic, and Gaby was then liable to do something uncontrolled. Too little fear would not render him pliable. Reading the document would bring his

orientation to the required level.

“Yes, oh Abdul. The document reads thus:

“We are the Guardians of the Revolution of Islam. Mohammed Kemal Khan, the Khan of Gunda, is a traitor to the Cause. The merger of the heathen organization called Clean-Alpes and the Karakorum Foundation is against the interests of the Islamic World. The Khan of Gunda has been fined two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. His son has been held as surety. The fine is to be paid within twenty-four hours.

“We are the Guardians of the Revolution. We are not hostage-takers. Kidnappers demand ransoms, and ransoms run into millions. It takes days to get that much money together. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars is a court fine, the modest sum obtainable from any bank within a day’s notice.

“The Khan of Gunda intends to engage in international diamond trafficking with Wall Street Jews. The Guardians will not let him succeed in his nefarious ambitions.

“Long live the Revolution!”

In small print under the communiqué was a little line not meant to be published or transmitted. It read: “Failure to transmit the bulletin on the eight o’clock news will result in the loss of an ear-lobe of Prince Rustam. On your Christian consciences will the ear-lobe lie.”

The BMW snaked out of the farmhouse. A small dose of atarax injected into the left buttock ensured that Rustam fell into a deep sleep. He was securely

## BLOOD MONEY

strapped with a seat belt in the back seat. It allowed Johnny and Nathalie to sit at the front.

The police car was parked at an angle just after the blind corner leading to the main road passing through the village. Johnny ceased his whistling and assumed his best Sandhurst smile and English accent.

*"Bonjour, monsieur le agent,"* he pronounced, accentuating the English consonants and vowels in deadly aural assault against the Gallic ear cocked to understand him. So atrociously delivered were his words, that Nathalie had to control a giggle and the policeman had stopped in mid-stride.

*"Quoi?"* he said.

*"Monsieur le agent ..."* Johnny began and was rudely interrupted by a wave from the police officer.

*"Tourist Anglais"* he said disgustedly over his shoulder.

"Messy buckets," Johnny replied cheerfully, as he eased the BMW forward. His palms felt sweaty.

At seven, the French cabinet met in emergency session. It was decided that the communiqué would be announced on TV and radio. The French government took the official position of advising the Khan against any negotiation. Unofficially, it was decided to prepare a small briefcase containing used small denomination dollar notes to the value of two hundred and fifty thousand. Messages of support were received by the Khan and the French government. Columnists all over

the world sat busily in front of their word processors with thesaurus programs.

Rehana sat with a cup of tea and uneaten cakes beside her. The English lady was wonderful. An aristocrat from Somerset on holiday in France. A doctor and a widow. So calm, so wonderful.

The Khan had contempt blazoned across his face. Contempt for this gang of crooks calling themselves "Guardians of the Revolution." There was no such organization in existence. Revolutionaries of no hue operated in this way.

It wasn't the Cosa Nostra either. The kidnapping was as professional as any organization's – the size of the ransom betrayed its scope. More likely a group of amateurs with professional experience. The odd ex-soldier and policeman, a pilot, a well-connected ex-con. *They had touched the heir to the Halqa.* He had phoned a coded message to his people. The Mafia in Nice would be contacted. As with Bhutto, a terrible revenge would be extracted. But that was later. He had already made up his mind. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars was like spit on the wind of the Karakorums. He would pay the dogs the money, and get his son back. Then he would strike, and they would feel the sting of the Tarangs, proverbially compared with that of the Karakorum viper's.

One thing he was sure about. This wasn't an operation to isolate him from his security cordon with a view to removing the head of the *Halqa!* This was simple extortion! He would have to wait for the next

## BLOOD MONEY

demand. It would come very soon.

Jean-Marie Charvet was head of Grenoble's *brigade criminelle*. He was about forty-eight, small and lithe with a wrinkled face. A tough cop who had risen from the ranks, he personally loathed criminals. Actually hated them. Kidnappers were the worst. These Guardians of the Revolution were another Arab bunch, and Arabs he didn't like. Too many of them in France. They had started running the rackets, dividing territory with the Italians. Bad sign. His dossiers were complete, the evidence strong against gangsters running illegal immigrants and drugs and gambling. For political reasons, he had been told to put his operation on hold. SOS *Racisme* had just held a strong demonstration in Paris. If he nabbed fifty odd Arab gangsters, everybody would jump on the bandwagon and scream "RACISTE!" But the Guardians of the Revolution had played into his hands. He didn't care that the helicopter pilot – now in an interrogation room down the corridor – claimed that Abdul was a converted *milord*. The DST could sort that one out with the British Security people. He was gonna round up all the Arab hoodlums he knew shouldn't be walking on the streets. Had not *monsieur le Préfet* himself insisted: "I want a complete dragnet – a crackdown. Pull in all the Arab hoodlums, all the radical organizations, the Islamic affiliations."

'Islamic affiliations' were the preserve of Renseignements Généraux. He was head of the *criminelle*. Tonight he was gonna sort out a lot of baddies. His men were in the briefing room waiting for



orders. He got up from his desk, whistling to himself.

Agatha and the psychologist, Joe Rosenberg, sat in front of professor Dufour's desk.

"We're here for a mid-ops assessment. We could start with our eminent psychologist. Joe?" Agatha indicated.

"Sure. Why not? Subject has exceeded our expectations in efficiency-level, which is good for results but not good for control. He has also fallen in love with our liaison officer."

"That's good, then. Better control," Agatha remarked.

"Not when she's fallen in love with him, too."

"On what basis do you conclude that?" Dufour wanted to know.

"By the paucity of information received from Officer Le Viallon, by her complete support of subject's demand for operational autonomy amounting to operational control – and by the sheer joy on her face. And I wish the couple a happy life," he added viciously. He was a psychologist, not a spook.

"What will the consequences of such a relationship be on the operation?" Dufour wanted to know.

"On the operation itself, none, hopefully. After the operation, yes. We had been hoping to recruit the subject as a long-term operative.

"As a loner, emotionally dependent on the Group, it would be an ideal situation. He isn't a loner any more. When a man loves a woman, she makes him feel ten feet tall. When the subject feels ten feet tall, he doesn't

## BLOOD MONEY

need us. He also thinks home, comfort, the fireplace-and-pipe mentality, which is useless to us if we want him for what we want him.

“And, of course, there’s the other possibility. They’re both in love. They decide to take the money and split to some romantic island paradise.”

“Impossible! She is French! And even though he’s English, he’s a Légionnaire!” Dufour protested.

“Yes, monsieur Dufour,” Agatha patiently agreed, “And your analyses displayed a Légionnaire’s loyalty to his contract.”

“Of course!”

“What’s his contract?” Agatha demanded.

“Taking out the Khan – period. At that, his contract ends. If we want more, we have to renegotiate the contract with your Légionnaire,” Joe laconically remarked.

“And as far as officer Le Viallon is concerned, are you trying to suggest that being French disbars her from falling in love and behaving like a woman in love?” Agatha wanted to know.

Dufour looked embarrassed, and at a loss for words.

“Give us your assessment of the kidnapping operation, *professeur*,” Agatha gently urged.

“Yes, of course. It had the precision of a Légion operation. French training!” The professor conveniently forgot two things: Johnny’s life hadn’t started in the Légion, and Prince Rustam’s bodyguards had also been Légionnaires. But of course, that was not relevant to the present assessment.

“The choice of the helicopter was astute. We provided the information, and he picked the same

person from the dossiers as we all had. The timing of the execution is being kept a little tight, but we all know how the Americans messed up the Song Tay raid in Vietnam. The use of the clown device put everybody off guard. He worked the crowd perfectly until he had them in his hands. The shotgun device threw them. After that the snatch was a foregone conclusion.

“Creating the Guardians of the Revolution ...” they all smiled “... was a masterstroke. Attention has effectively been diverted from the source of the operation. The communiqué was well done, especially the amount of the ransom chosen. It has several advantages:

“The sum is large enough for the kidnapping to be taken seriously, but not large enough for the family to say they need time to get the money together. An extension of the timetable inevitably helps the security forces.

“This will allow our subject to conclude the operation within the next twenty-four hours, if his astuteness is matched by consistency.”

“The big question is what is he gonna do afterwards? They’ve stumped us by falling in love! How’s Rehana taking it?” Joe wanted to know.

Rehana was now one of the crucial elements in the post-Khan period. After the Khan, she would be the regent of Gunda and of the *Halqa*. She would determine the future coherence of Islamic policy. She hated violence as much as she hated the West, but would the kidnapping of her son and elimination of her husband change that? It was vital to watch her closely, and to monitor her inner reactions.

## BLOOD MONEY

“Our agent has had no chance to report yet. We did not wire her because the scanners used by the police and the private bodyguards would have picked it up,” Dufour explained. “But by her courage and panache, she has placed herself in a position where the Princess Rehana will soon depend on her emotionally. Our agent is a good Frenchwoman!”

“I thought she was English,” Joe murmured.

“French by choice when she married an officer in the DGSE’s Service Action,” Dufour said firmly, his tone brooking no argument. “But of course she will not tell Princess Rehana that. Up until now, like all South Asians, the Princess has seen the French as preferable to their ex-colonial masters. The kidnapping will surely change that, and she will resent the French. The elimination of her husband will also destroy her romantic notions of *la France*.” The professor’s regret at this loss was distinct. “Finding herself alone in a hostile European environment, her brain will look for a fall-back position. She will find it by ignoring her resentment of colonialism and focusing on the honorable relationship between the British Raj and the princely states of British India.

“And let us not forget that our agent, herself a doctor, is the daughter of Colonel Hackworth, an army doctor of the British Indian army and resident of the state of Gunda. After his retirement, he devoted his life to the Tarangs. His grave is in Gunda, meticulously looked after as a matter of honor.

“Wouldn’t Rehana be suspicious that this lady just

popped up? Too pat I'd say!" Joe interjected.

Professor Dufour smiled benignly.

"Loyalty to Colonel Hackworth's memory is based on gratitude. As a doctor, he ministered to the Tarangs. Even today, they feel the weight of this debt. When loyalty and gratitude clash with the timely appearance of this lady, *kismet* and predestination will push aside suspicion. Rehana is the academic product of western enlightenment, but a daughter of the Karakorums. After all, the primitive and the enlightened cohabit in all of us, explaining the savage behaviour of Oxbridge educated dictators and the resurgence of paganism in the West. Indeed, Arundhati Roy says something on the lines that an Indian – which includes Pakistanis – lives different centuries more or less simultaneously!"

"What's that supposed to mean? And who is this whatever Roy?" Joe interrupted with obvious irritation.

The professor frowned imperceptibly.

"Author of 'The God of Small Things', awarded the 1997 Booker Prize."

He paused, then continued.

"And in our case Roy's observation means Rehana's western education and manners coexist comfortably with native tradition. As you yourself observed in one of your papers, Pakistanis and Arabs managed to cook their sauce in Afghanistan under the shelter of Afghan traditions of hospitality, friendship, gratitude and succor. One day, they will even accept bombs to protect their Arab 'guest' and Pakistani 'friends'."

Joe cleared his throat and nodded, a wiser man.

"That means she'll be in, but watched like a hawk!"

## BLOOD MONEY

“Of course, and as she proves her sincerity, loyalty to Colonel Hackworth’s memory will overtake suspicion.

“Princess Rehana will not fail to take comfort in the old relationship with the British after her ‘disappointment’ with the French,” the professor concluded with obvious regret at the choice of Britain over France.

“How did you find this asset?” Joe wanted to know.

“Madame Lecourt is the widow of a French intelligence officer. She is also the daughter of Colonel Hackworth. The offer I made will allow her to realize her love for her father, her husband, *la France*, and herself.”

“Why herself?”

“She is a lonely woman. Her three children are at university, and she still reveres her husband’s memory. She will never take a male companion. This has given her a purpose in life.”

“What about training? Your report said she didn’t need any, but there was no annotation explaining why,” Agatha observed in a cold, professional tone.

“None was required.” The professor’s tone was equally cold. “She is an agent of influence, and general intelligence about the state of the Princess’ mind. As a highborn English lady, daughter of a colonial officer, she has a natural discretion we cannot improve upon. I say again, she was married into the *service action* of the DGSE. If, as I hope, she is invited to accompany the Princess back, and discovers something of vital importance, she will take a shopping trip to Islamabad. In any case, the cultural attaché at the British Embassy is her nephew. Naturally, he will visit her from time to

time. She will obviously involve herself with the Gunda Foundation's hospitals in Gunda. Her demand for a Hackworth Memorial Clinic would be welcomed by the people and state government of Gunda. Eventually her cousin will offer Commonwealth help in terms of personnel and finance.

"The Schengen Group will then be established in Gunda. We will be able to closely watch any signs of a renaissance of the *Halqa*."

"Great, professor. *Finesse* is a French word."

Joe Rosenberg's compliment was sincere and serious.

Professor Dufour bowed his head in appropriate modesty.

"We all agreed that our subject have autonomy – best guarantee of security. But I can't help wondering, *professeur*, where this Sandhurst Légionnaire's got the Prince. You must have guessed," Agatha mused, with a sidelong look at the professor.

The academic rose to the occasion.

"Of course it is possible to make an accurate guess. Officer Le Viallon's parents were very active members of Groupe Roland of the Vercors Resistance. Before the Germans entered Grenoble, they spirited away Bayard's statue from the Place St André and hid it for the duration of the occupation. Even within Groupe Roland, they told no one where they had hidden the statue. Even today, their lips are sealed."

"But the general area must be rumored about," Joe urged

"No doubt. My guess is that Officer Le Viallon acquired access to this hiding place, and that the

## BLOOD MONEY

Prince is kept there.”

“Where’s this place supposed to have been?”  
Agatha insisted.

The professor sighed with resignation.

“The ruins of the old Fort Rabot on the Bastille. Its underground passages. At this moment, Prince Rustam is in the bowels of the Bastille. While the forces of law and order hunt him nation-wide, the Légionnaire is hiding him in the eye of the storm.”

Johnny looked in the rear-view mirror. The policeman was standing indolently by the side of the road, after letting an English tourist through. Johnny’s ruse had worked. He glanced at Nathalie. Her face was set. He put his hand on her thigh, then removed it. Agreeing to the operation – first for professional reasons – then for emotional ones – was one thing. Seeing the effect of being kidnapped on a little boy, and actually frightening him, was a different kettle of fish.

“Johnny?”

“Yes?”

“Nothing.”

After the next bend there was enough of the hard shoulder to park on. He took her in his arms without a word, engine idling. He held her like that until he felt her shoulders relax, and her head flop into the curve of his collarbone. He raised her face and kissed her lightly.

“Johnny ...” she murmured.

“Everything’ll be all right,” he said confidently.

He gunned the car in a spray of gravel towards Grenoble.



The perfectly tuned engine of the BMW hissed into the multi-storey car park. Rustam was still asleep, his face almost peaceful. Johnny sat at the steering wheel. In a pre-rehearsed drill, Nathalie left to get the van she had hired as Madame Bougama, a North African lady. In dark-brown makeup, a dark wig and dark glasses, it hadn't been difficult.

Johnny was on full alert. He sat at the steering wheel of the BMW with a paper in front of him. His eyes could see over the edge of the paper. They scanned regularly with the instinctive pattern of a trained and experienced *infantier's*.

He judged angles and approaches, estimating the slightest sound and movement. This wasn't no-man's land. He was out of that and in the middle of the enemy's killing zone. So far, everything appeared to be normal. The problem was, no operation ever went as planned. Yet, this one might, because his planning was flexible, and the ransom timetable tight. Before anyone had a clue, he should grab the modest ransom and then move into the next phase of his plans. After that it wouldn't matter.

He heard a car engine starting up, and loosened the knife in its sheath. His best chance, though, was bluff – definitely not a firefight. Maybe the knife. The car with Provençal number-plates came slowly around the corner and then stalled in front of him. All his senses came alive in a single burst of synergy. Lone female

## BLOOD MONEY

driver. Angles, cover. No. Clear. Woman looked embarrassed. Acting? No – with a foolish look she started the Clio and drove off. The paper had hidden his face well. A biker roared towards him. Motorbike cop? It was a Hell's Angel, turning with the discipline of a soldier, his club colors proudly stitched over his denim vest.

Nathalie parked the van in reverse in the slot nearly opposite him. This was another phase of increased risk – transferring the lad into the van. She left the engine running. She hadn't touched anything in the BMW, and he used a handkerchief to wipe fingerprints off the steering wheel and gearshift. They sat and listened. It wouldn't be any quieter. Johnny felt exposed and naked crossing the few yards to the van with Rustam in his arms. Like there were a half-dozen Chadian machine-guns trained on him. His back prickled, and then he was safely across. Rustam was strapped into a booster seat.

There was still nobody around. Johnny went back to the BMW and knelt in front of the front wheel as though to examine it. Discreetly, he wiped the door handle, then did the same with all the other door handles. He locked the BMW, then took the keys. For the next twenty-four hours, the car was safe from a random check by police or private security.

Outside the car park, the streetlights had been switched on. Bus stops were full of tired workers waiting to get home. They hadn't yet heard of the kidnapping by the Guardians of the Revolution. When they did, they would shrug it off with another curse at the Arabs. At least this time the target wasn't

European.

Nathalie's face was set as they got out of the center of town and took the road along the Isère river leading towards the La Tronche hospital. She was tense, and looked it. Johnny was also tense, but didn't look it. If they were stopped here, they might be involved in a firefight, and there would be no help from the Schengen Group. The price of running an independent operation. Nathalie was careful not to break the speed limit, but then somebody flashed their lights behind her and she realized she wasn't behaving normally. Most van drivers in France seemed to have an almost religious obligation to drive fifteen to twenty kilometers above the speed limit. She accelerated, and Johnny understood why. They turned left off the hospital, passed through the narrow alleys of La Tronche village, then climbed in second gear for a good three kilometers. The last bend, and the engine sighed in relief at the car park where the bubble cars docked on top of the Bastille. There were old battlements and ruins everywhere. A sign indicated *Restaurant de Téléphérique* where they'd had lunch not long ago. Rough stone steps rose upwards, then down. Nathalie turned the headlights off, and they sat quietly. A couple came down the steps, and they ducked neatly below the windows.

After a few seconds they heard an engine start up, then drive away. Johnny put his hand on Nathalie's arm, preventing her from bobbing her head up. Enemy makes noises of going away, count to ten, then ten again. Breathe slowly, listen hard. Scan. Don't skyline yourself against anything, ever. From an angle of the window, Johnny peeped with half an eye. He lowered

## BLOOD MONEY

his head, and moved it so that he covered his field of observation from the other end of the window. Clear. Then they slowly rose and got in their seats.

After a few minutes Johnny went to the back of the van.

From one of the rucksacks, he extracted a medical kit. He raised Rustam's eyelid and shined a pencil torch. He took the blood pressure, then the pulse. The lad was unharmed. In another hour or so it would be really dark. He would be out of it by then. They could then walk with him to the hideout.

They felt the effect of the twilight slowly giving way to complete darkness. They were alone, surrounded by trees and the ghosts of Roman and Gaul warriors. They held hands, then they kissed. He massaged her shoulders, then kissed her earlobe. She sighed, and he was relieved. He stroked her breasts, and felt her relaxing. She put her hand on his groin. They kissed deeply. Another car drove up, freezing them in its headlights until they lit up a parking slot. They stayed like that until the couple went up the steps to the restaurant.

"I love you," they whispered to each other.

Then their breathing calmed, and the sun between them disappeared. It was dark, but Johnny would give it another hour. They were both pros and he had a busy night ahead of him. She sat watch. He put his head on her lap and slept.

They were pros but they were also lovers and he looked so sweet, his face in repose, mouth a little slack, body at peace. It would be over soon – and then what? She didn't know, except she wanted to be wherever he

was, and they would just make it up as they went along. She had complete faith in his operational ability. They would get the ransom, fulfill the contract with the Schengen Group, and then the one to themselves. She also desperately wanted him to see some success in his life that didn't come from the anonymous might of a government force. His successes contrasted oddly with his failures. He had been accepted at Sandhurst, proving himself to be part of an elite minority. He had made the SAS, an elite within the elite. He had acquitted himself well in action – once mentioned in dispatches in Ireland, twice in the Falklands before the *incident* on the glacier. He had succeeded in the Légion. The Légion had chosen him to be a ligament of its spinal column by anointing him in the fast-track brotherhood of the *filière rapide* of promotion. He had been cited in Chad, and decorated in the Gulf for “operations prejudicial to enemy mobility” in which he showed “incredible initiative and sense of responsibility,” which meant a wet or black operation conducted at the behest of one of the intelligence services. Yet, above all, she credited his biggest success to survival within the Légion. He had taken a voluntary demotion from commissioned officer to private and showed that he could rough it with ORs and nob it with officers. Unlike some Spanish officers in the Légion after the abortive coup of 1981, he hadn't sunk into self-pity and despair. Neither had he allowed his brain to become “brutalized”. In fact, the Légion contract had honed it. She was proud of her man.

But his failures. The *glacier incident*. Self imposed exile from his native island. The collapse of all his post-

## BLOOD MONEY

Légion plans for the success of this. Failure induced by outside forces with higher concerns than self-advancement. *His watch!* He had lost, and then overcome that loss. The only miscalculation by the Schengen Group. In their last meeting the Group had decided to obliterate any trace in the records connecting them with the watch. The man could be of use in the future, even if he did a bunk after the operation. He had changed her life – she felt different, and sensed the change in him. Where would their entangled lives lead them, and what would they become? What had she become, frightening the life out of a little child? Her womb ached.

She kissed her man and he was instantly awake in the dark silence. Faint sounds of conversation and cutlery on china drifted on the night air from the restaurant patio. Johnny kept his head on her lap and listened to the night. The slight swish of traffic a hundred yards below the Bastille was a companion. There were clouds hiding starlight. High clouds, not rain clouds. Good for night patrol, without getting them wet.

There were faint groans of wakefulness from the back of the van. He sat up and indicated with his head. Reality hit the pit of her stomach and she steeled herself. Play frighteners again. She thought of the *Halqa* and its threat to world peace.

In a few sinuous movements she was at Rustam's side.

"Look away" she commanded in a whisper. "If you value your life and your mother's, don't look at me or Abdul. Clear?"

Rustam nodded, shivering with cold, fear and the

after-effects of the drug.

“We will now take you to a secret place. You will not be able to see anything, so hold my hand tightly, and don’t make a sound.”

He nodded again.

From her rucksack she took out a pair of dark glasses. The inside had been painted black. She put them over Rustam’s eyes. Anyone seeing them would only feel a rush of pity for a couple walking a blind child.

Johnny once again wiped off all fingerprints inside the van, while she stayed crouched next to Rustam, holding a Coca-Cola can with a straw. He drank gratefully, in long gulps, spluttered, then got a hold on himself. His stomach rumbled and she whispered: “Soon we’ll eat – if you’re good!”

Johnny came over to the back of the van and opened the doors. She handed him a pair of night vision goggles, then put hers on. The trees jumped with startling clarity into her green luminous vision. She hopped out, and both put the rucksacks over their backs.

“Come,” she said to Rustam, holding his hand.

She helped him out. He was unsteady on his feet, and she walked him up and down for a minute, Johnny watchful with his hand on the .357. If they got burned here, it would mean a firefight and a hostage situation. The trees fluttered and they went still, hardly breathing. Then Johnny relaxed. It was some form of bird life having a nightmare. He shut and locked the van doors and moved off after Nathalie. She walked straight into the woods, and he followed her, confident she knew

## BLOOD MONEY

what she was about. She moved in a direction diagonal to the restaurant, and straight up. The gradient was steep, pulling at their ankles. The night-goggles gave the world a dark green luminous tinge: yellow-white, a world like living in a film negative, but the slow, careful rhythm of the march allowed them to move soundlessly.

Five minutes and they were on second wind. Then Nathalie raised her hand and they stopped. Her body language bespoke adrenaline. *The unforeseen – what you couldn't plan for but dealt with because all the drills you'd practiced over the years came together.* She pushed Rustam behind a bush, signaled Johnny to come forward. He knelt next to her. They overlooked a small glade leading off the track that snaked down to the restaurant patio. They could see the glow of lights, and hear faint laughter. People enjoying themselves.

In the glade the scruffy man in biker's clothes had his mouth half-open. He was panting with a diabolical excitement. The little boy he had kidnapped was on his knees, trousers down and vulnerable buttocks bared. His body was rigid with terror. The man was unbuckling his belt, his back to Nathalie and Johnny. Nathalie's eyes were wide with horror. She looked at Johnny. His face was expressionless. The man was undoing his fly when Johnny rose like a wraith. When the man's trousers were halfway down his thighs Johnny jumped. From just over two meters, at a horizontal angle, he was able to slam both feet into the man's kidneys, rolled and tried to break his fall with his hands, and only half succeeded, tasting dirt and scraping an elbow. In a single roll, he was back on his feet, then jumped with



both feet on the prone man's back. There was a sharp crack of vertebrae, but the pain exploding in his kidneys had completely knocked the pervert out. There was only a muted grunt at the broken vertebrae.

The child had rolled into a corner of the glade and curled himself into the fetus position. Johnny looked up, and raised a hand, staying Nathalie in mid-jump. He pointed a finger at the bush that hid Rustam. Ignoring the child, Johnny took the pervert's shoes and socks off.

Oblivious to the fetid smell, he took the laces out and put the shoes behind a rock. Then he tied the thumbs of the pervert's hands and feet together. It was as solid as handcuffs, and wasted neither cord nor energy. He went to the child, who recoiled with fear. Johnny gently turned him around, so he was facing away. The Camillus slid noiselessly into his hand and he knelt over the pervert, trussed up with his knees bent, face skywards. Far away, thunder rumbled, and an owl hooted. Over the Vercors plateau in the far distance a fork of lightning appeared for a millisecond. A woman laughed shrilly in the restaurant below. Johnny held the man's squidgy penis and lowered the knife for an upperhand slice.

"No!"

Nathalie's whisper was harsh with command.

Her presence loomed over him and stayed his hand. He remained frozen in a barbaric ritual of Arcadian deities and mortals caught in a timeless frieze.

"No!"

The knife disappeared. Johnny raised his head to the sky, like a wolf silently lowing. Then he spat with

## BLOOD MONEY

precision on the flaccid penis.

He went to the child and talked to him in a series of sounds that represented no language. He massaged his shoulders gently, and the sounds were those he would have made to a wounded animal. Gradually, the child came out of his self-induced rigor mortis and let his trousers be pulled up.

“Do as I tell you, and you’ll be safe. The man can’t harm you – ever. Go down the track to the restaurant. There are ...” Johnny stopped short. The lad was in no state. He would wander off – could even die of fright. *The unforeseen*. As he had been trained to, Johnny reacted even before the unconscious decision had completed itself. He picked up the child on his shoulders, and ignoring the track, relying on his night-glasses, loped back the way they had come. He put the boy at the bottom of the steps and pointed the way. Obediently, the boy walked up the steps. Johnny withdrew to the shelter of a chestnut tree and waited. He caught the change of tone in the conversation, then a woman’s voice clearly carried into the night

“The boy’s been abused! I’m a social worker. Blanket, ambulance, police. Quick!”

*Police!* Yes, they’d be here soon. *The unforeseen!* Shit! The entire chapter of *Compromised Hideout* and the man-hours of grueling exercises and drills that went with it flashed through Johnny’s adrenaline-charged brain cells in a millisecond of eternity. Then his brain crystallized into the functioning operational machine two governments had spent considerable time and effort turning it into.

*As he loped back to the Hasty RV where the rest of*

*the patrol waited with a POW for an Isolation Operation, his brain seemed to expand, then acquire a controlled density. Every leaf, every stone seemed to be in sharp focus. Backgrounds made way for the present. He was at total concentration and maximum focus. He approached the Hasty RV with care, listening, circling, then giving the signal. You could get shot by one of your own.*

Nathalie gripped his shoulders fiercely.

She led them at the same pace, in a slightly different direction, leading Rustam by the hand. She felt the trembling of his little hand. *Not long now.*

They came to a rock face. Nathalie turned around it, and there was a yawning hole, about three meters high by two meters wide. The entrance was overgrown with weeds, some waist high. Without a pause Nathalie walked into it. They came up against another dead end, but this time it was part of the old battlements. On their left and right were thick vines covering the rock walls. Nathalie raised the one on the left as easily as one would a curtain. Behind it was another passage. Humidity assailed their nostrils, and Rustam sneezed, then whimpered. The passage rose steeply, then wound in a series of turns that brought them before a drawbridge across a moat. Over the centuries, the old moat and drawbridge had been covered by earth, unknown to archaeologists. They were thus in a tunnel, before a moat and a raised drawbridge buried underground. It was a child's adventure dream come true, but neither the blacked out glasses nor his captivity allowed Rustam to appreciate it.

Nathalie manipulated an old wheel with a handle,

## BLOOD MONEY

creakily bringing the drawbridge down. Further on the passage narrowed, and rose until they were walking crouched. They came to a turn-off ending in a sort of cavern. Nathalie indicated with her hand, and Johnny understood that Bayard's statue had been secreted here.

A little further, and they had to crawl for fifty yards, then they were in a dry earthen cave. On one side it was open, and they had a magnificent view of Grenoble and the railway station. Johnny now understood. The underground passage had two entrances and exits. These were the caves above the Bastille, which used to be the meditational eyrie of a Medieval order of monks. In the 19th century, they became known as Mandrin's grottoes, suspected to be one of the hideouts of the local Robin Hood and smugglers. Below the opening was a sheer drop of fifty meters, before the hill sloped in a dizzying gradient down to the dual carriageway parallel with the motorway. With his head stuck out, he could see the metalled road linking the Restaurant de la Bastille with the Restaurant le Père Gras. It was a good hundred meters away on the curve of the cliff-face. No access possible from road to cave. The only exit from the cave would be by abseiling or parasailing. Good.

Johnny ripped open a ration box, chucked the entire contents into a mess tin, added a dash of cognac from the little flacon in the ration box, and in five minutes had a *Légion soupe cowboy* bubbling over a gas stove. Rustam gulped it hungrily, then Nathalie made him hot chocolate after tucking him into a sleeping bag. He had stopped trembling, but was still fearful. She stroked his

forehead, then scratched his hair gently. CNRS research documents described that as the South Asian mothers' response to child insomnia. It seemed to be working.

It was so nice, and soothing. His mother's hand – his *mother*. Rustam sat bolt upright, completely surprising Nathalie. His eyes opened wide and he took a full look at Nathalie and Johnny. He opened his mouth wide, then Johnny was on him in a single leap, hand on his mouth.

“Your mother will die, fool!” he warned.

“Do you understand, son of Kemal Khan the Traitor?”

The eyes grew round as saucers, filled once again with terror, but anger as well. Johnny removed his hand.

“My father is not a traitor. We are not traitors.”

He spat in Johnny's face. The spittle dribbled down Johnny's cheeks, but there was no anger – only comprehension in his eyes. He looked at Nathalie. She already had the hypodermic ready. Before Rustam could twist, Johnny's grip tightened. The thin needle plunged into the unformed muscle of the rigid biceps.

Johnny lay at the entrance to the secret passage. The sounds of clumsy boots in the woods and loud cries rose up to where he was. *The unforeseen!* Police brought in, had found the pervert. They were now looking for the lad's rescuer. It wouldn't be long before some senior police officer understood the similarity between a commando's *modus operandi* and the way

## BLOOD MONEY

the little boy had been rescued.

He couldn't circle right, because that would bring him to the road that was bound to have a police vehicle with *les flics* bumbling on it. He could cross it, but after that there were only sheer drops. *Natural obstacle*. Circling left, he would either veer away from Grenoble, or bump into another police car. *Man-made obstacle – wrong line of march – time factor*. Odd wink of fireflies in original line of march. The duffers were smoking. The night goggles lent him the advantages of surprise and stealth.

He still moved with care, maintaining battle drills. Preselected bounds within bounds. Zig, then zag. Estimated distance of each bound. Immediate visual recce before crossing a bound. Observing each cover. Moving slowly, on the edges of his shoes. Senses heightened, awareness transcendental. Two of the duffers engaged in a loud conversation about soccer told him to avoid them. A cigarette glow, two paramedics with a stretcher. Restaurant patrons with loud voices altercation with the police. For now the unforeseen provided him with noise cover. It wouldn't take long for somebody to start wondering what a commando had been doing at night in the woods above Rabot. Last bound before he turned left into the university residences where there were phone boxes.

*Last bound* – and moving into a secure area was when a patrol was most vulnerable because it let its guard down, therefore conventional military wisdom dictated a simple drill – increased vigilance – and the drill saved him from an unpleasant choice. Ten meters from the treeline on the edge of the road, he fell into the

drill pattern. Stop, control your breathing. A waiting enemy skilled in fieldcraft can pick out the pattern. Listen, wait, scan. It was the policeman's sigh that gave him away. Actually a Gendarme, with paratrooper's wings. Must have thought about his wife, or girlfriend, or his own predicament. He was leaning against a tree. No cigarette, no movement, no silhouetting – just a well-trained Gendarme. Johnny bypassed him by a good five meters, then moved another five along the trees lining the road. There was silence, and he could see lights in the university halls, and hear voices, but not many. He took the night-goggles off and put them in the little rucksack, which was the same kind carried by most students. From the rucksack he produced an Arab kaffiyeh that was popular on campuses. He threw it over his head and put the two ends around his neck, casually obscuring complete identification. Five minutes later his pupils had started expanding in response to the darkness. He gave it another five minutes, and not the full twenty required for night vision. Then he stepped onto the road leading to the halls about eighty meters away.

The Rabot Halls are on two levels. If you come down from the Restaurant de Téléphérique, the track opens onto a set of tennis courts, and four story modern buildings built in a hollow square with the university restaurant forming one end. Twenty yards below is part of the old barracks, with spacious rooms and corridors. Below that is a straight line of halls overlooking Grenoble. This new construction is an extension of the old part of the fort, where privileged students are accorded residence in spacious, high

## BLOOD MONEY

ceilinged rooms.

Johnny accordingly passed the tennis courts and entered the hollow square of buildings with the university restaurant to his left. He passed in front of *residence Vercors* and just before the steps leading down to the second level was a phone box. There were cars parked around the hollow square, but only some of the rooms had lights on. Faint sounds of rock music drifted on the air, and a couple were having a nice cuddle silhouetted against a lit window. Two slightly tipsy male students passed by. Both cast vacant smiles in his direction that he acknowledged with a thumbs-up sign.

In the privacy of the booth he dialed Nessimi's unlisted number. They made the final arrangements. Nessimi confirmed his end of the logistics. If he had guessed about the esplanade kidnapping, he gave no hint of it over the phone.

He then dialed another number, spoke rapidly and authoritatively, then put the phone down. Without running, but at a brisk pace, he walked down the steps in the direction of the town center.

In five minutes he was at the foot of the 264 steps leading down from the Musée Dauphinois in the 17th century abbey of the monastic St Mark d'en Haut order. In 1968, André Malraux, French Nobel prizewinner, had inaugurated it as the site of the local heritage museum. He reached the Place de la Cymaise – or Cymaise square. The fountain at the little square was built in 1843 by Sappey to commemorate the point from which Lucien Muratius Planus' Roman Légionnaires launched their first bridge across the river Isère in 43 BC. The



fountain bears the plaque of a serpent entwined about a lion. The lion represents the river Drac, and the serpent entwined around it, the river Isère. There is now a suspension bridge restricted to pedestrian traffic spanning the river at the exact spot where the finest professional soldiers of their time had accomplished a feat of engineering.

In the phone box between the Roman Légionnaires' bridge and their commemorative fountain, Johnny was engineering the last phase of his operation. He dialed the same number he had five minutes earlier, spoke rapidly replaced the phone and walked down the rue Saint Laurent to another phone box.

The Khan of Gunda was a warrior in the South Asian tradition, in which the values of the Mahabharata predominate. Conversion to Islam, Christianity or Sikhism only retains the fundamentals of these values. The South Asian warrior believes the body to be a professional tool, and in times of stress is culturally oriented to keep it in working condition. Mohammed Kemal Khan had just forced himself to eat a large helping of ratatouille and steak Provençal. He was now sipping a small black coffee, which his bodyguards detested. They missed their brewed Karakorum tea. Two *commissaires* – one from the local DST and another from Paris – sat next to him. They were being studiously ignored by the Tarangs.

Rehana was in the next room. By Allah's grace, the daughter of the famous Colonel Hackworth – a doctor and a widow who had been married to a French civil

## BLOOD MONEY

servant, had taken charge. Though Rehana was not under sedation, it was only the English doctor's firm control of the situation that prevented her from being so. Rehana had had a nourishing meal of hot lamb's broth, and was now recounting Colonel Hackworth's exploits woven into local Gunda legend to his daughter, Olivia.

Rehana heard the telephone squeak in the next room. She tensed, then Olivia took her hand and gently squeezed it. She forced herself to be calm. She was a Princess.

Mohammed Kemal Khan picked up the little beige telephone that was only meant to ring when the police filtered a ransom call from the kidnapper. His gut contracted, but he forced his face to remain impassive.

"Hello. Mohammed Kemal Khan, Khan of Gunda ..."

"Shut up, traitor!" admonished the voice at the other end in an Oxbridge drawl. "This is the Action Command of the Guardians of the Revolution – *Allah Akbar!* Tomorrow at 10:00pm be in the phone box at the Place Grenette opposite the Cintra bar with the ransom money. You will be under observation. No tricks!"

The phone went dead. Impossible to trace the source of such a brief transmission, although technicians were frantically trying their best.

Commissaire Charvet stubbed out his fourth cigarette. The unofficial anti-crime campaign was allowing him to catch most of the *gros bonnets* he'd had his eye on over the past two years. As reports from units came in, a female inspector moved colored pins and flags on a

wall-map in the PC - *poste de commandement*. They were being pulled in from their little restaurants and cafés and shops that had upper and inner rooms for other activities. Thanks to the Guardians of the Revolution, the cries of “*racisme!*” would be muted or ignored. Charvet was a genuinely tolerant man, who hated Arab organized crime as much as he hated Asian and Sicilian and Pied Noir and Corsican organized crime. Sociological reasons for letting an ethnic community have its run of terrorizing first its own people, and then others, was a crime in itself.

It just wasn't right. And then this incident in the woods around Fort Rabot. What a lucky break! The pervert's fingerprints conclusively matched those of the child molester the Grenoble police had been hunting for over seven years. He had killed three children, and molested and mauled another ten. He wouldn't be doing much again. With a ruptured spleen and a broken back, in or out of prison was academic. The person who had disabled the pervert had done them a favor – but why did this highly skilled and obviously trained fighter not claim credit for the rescue? There had been two professional *coups* today – one at the esplanade, and another not ten minutes away by car. Hang on – was there a link?

He picked up the phone and dialed the DST number.

*Chef de Reseau* literally means network chief, but it describes, in the DST, the job of a field director of the French equivalent of the FBI. In Grenoble, the offices of

## BLOOD MONEY

the DST are on one of the top floors of the modern Police Headquarters. The *chef de Reseau* made soothing sounds into the phone, placating Charvet.

“*Mais non, mon cher Charvet!* One is a terrorist organization, the other probably a student living in Rabot qualified in the martial arts, who prefers to stay anonymous because he doesn't want to get ticked off by a judge for excessive violence. The others, *cher ami*, are hardened mid-Eastern terrorists. They might rescue one of their own, but one of ours? Non!”

An exchange of pleasantries, and both officers put their phones down.

The *chef de Reseau* was relieved. He had done his duty. Actually, fifteen minutes earlier his mind had run along the same lines as his colleague's. He had accordingly put in an inquiry to Paris asking for urgent analyses of certain dossiers of ex-military personnel. Professional *engagés volontaires* from French special forces with emphasis on the Foreign Légion, discharged within the last two years, and suspected of being in the Grenoble region. He had curtly been informed that it was impossible to answer his query since all such dossiers at the General Headquarters had been appropriated by the Elysée Palace six months ago *and dammit this information is unofficial*. Appropriation meant blanket security blocking access for *raison d'état*. As understanding of the implications dawned on him, his blood had run cold.

The Khan and the police officers had listened to the tape repeatedly. It only confirmed what the frightened

Gaby had told the police. Abdul the Man-eater was an English convert to Islam. The tape was also being studied by Grenoble University's foremost linguists – among the best in their field. Something niggled in the Khan's brain but he couldn't put a finger on it. He pushed the niggle aside to concentrate on the mechanics of getting his son back alive. Bloody crooks! Guardians of my bloody balls! If he was right and it was just a front name to cover the intrepidity of two to four crooks, he could hold the messenger hostage – if he got that close! He shook his head. A representative of the French government was reassuring him that the money had been arranged, and to avoid complications, all the Khan had to do was to sign a check for the equivalent amount made out to the Banque de France. He nodded absently. He understood all that.

Once again a message of support from Clean-Alpes. They had made it clear to the Elysée Palace that they stood firmly behind him, and expected this outrage to be cleaned up.

It was late, but Nessimi was still in his office. Twice he had had to leave to make calls from public phone boxes. The coded faxes and phone calls all confirmed the arrangements.

Good. Nessimi's shadow clientele had been woven by discreet word of mouth. He had a reputation for honesty, discretion, and secrecy. Once again, he would prove it. Before locking up the office, he sat for a few minutes with his eyes shut, letting his unconscious mind go over all the details. No. Nothing had been

## BLOOD MONEY

overlooked. He re-read the details of the bank transactions. The money would all be filtered to the Isle of Man. Then there was cash in used ten pound notes, but that would be deposited in accounts already opened in the names of Mr and Mrs Goodall. Michel and his Mercedes were primed and ready, with Mr and Mrs Goodall's luggage and passports in it. The Englishman, Nessimi conceded, was the most brilliant operator he had ever worked with.

In Paris, the librarians of the daily Le Monde and Figaro newspapers gave up in frustration. Nowhere in their meticulously classed archives was an organization called Guardians of the Revolution.

Le Monde's Grenoble stringer had excitedly phoned in to report to the chief investigative reporter that the helicopter kidnapping had mentioned Abdul the Man-eater and Fatima the Pious, and the Bekaa valley in Lebanon. Well, this must be a new name under one of the umbrella organizations. The librarian had just reported a definitive dead end in his archives. Time to activate contacts and call in favors. He lifted the phone and started dialing.

Johnny reached the hideout at two in the morning, alert and combat-ready. Nathalie's eyes were tired, though she was also on the alert. Her response to the signal whistle had been instantaneous. They kissed hungrily, then exchanged OK reports. Rustam was asleep. It would be over soon. He reheated the *soupe cowboy*.

Nathalie had some. His alarms and booby traps were in place. The hideout was secure. They made love standing up with an intense hunger neither had experienced before.

Three top technicians of the super secret American National Security Agency shared the space that held their consoles with a General. They didn't know his name, and were supposed to forget about him as soon as he walked out. But *they* would stay in this place for the next thirty-six hours.

They had rehearsed the operation several times on different targets in different parts of the world. They were perfectly confident of themselves and their technology. There was none better. The public had dubbed it Reagan's Star Wars. To these professionals, it was laser technology coming from Strategic Defense Initiative research.

Sitting at NSA headquarters, they could cause a satellite to shoot a laser beam at a penny on earth, or cause a thick cable to short-circuit. And when the General ordered it, that was exactly what they would do.

The General himself had no connection with the Schengen Group – was not even aware of its existence. He was there because he was a General. He would receive a code word from the Chief of Staff of the White House. As a General, he had the rank to give the technicians the order to use America's secret and deadly weapons on foreign soil. He would give that order ... *without ever knowing which part of the world*

## BLOOD MONEY

*the laser beam was fired onto.*



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The phone call had come at seven in the morning. The instructions had been precise. At two in the afternoon, the same instructions had been repeated and confirmed. He was to expect a call at five-thirty.

By five-thirty, the series of calls and instructions had their desired effect. The Khan, the DST and the prefect had their nerves on edge. Only Antoine Rombach, the anonymous but very powerful official from Paris, remained unperturbed. He was one of Europe's foremost experts in hostage negotiation, and he sat in professional admiration at the kidnapers' astuteness. Only rural bandits in places like Sardinia, Corsica and India, or guerrilla organizations in places like Peru, operating in territory where the local population is sympathetic, can afford the long wait of a protracted negotiation. Which is why kidnapping for profit in a hostile environment – a definition of Rustam's kidnapping – required that the kidnapper wind-up the operation within a week. Time was on the side of the authorities, who sought to prolong the negotiations on the time-honored excuse that the ransom demand was too high and that there were "problems" getting the money together. This was a classic ploy designed to give the authorities time to investigate and set up a

## BLOOD MONEY

trap. Kidnappers know it, but fall for the ploy each time because of their own greed. They demand exorbitant sums and then let their own greed involve them in complicated negotiations. Each step of unforeseen negotiations leaves little holes in their plans. For the police, these missteps are like handholds in a rock face for an experienced climber. Thus, professional kidnappers in a hostile environment who can clean up and get out within seventy-two hours are top-of-the-line, and within forty-eight hours, lucky as well. The Guardians of the Revolution seemed set to make it within twenty-four hours, which also made them geniuses. Reasonable ransom corresponding perfectly to the paying capacity of the family and the cash availability of banks in an age of plastic money. The tight timetable and no-nonsense approach indicated a high level of intelligence and training. The training of an army officer, perhaps? Guardians of the Revolution! No demands, only money, and that, too, a modest amount going by current standards. Of course they would succeed – this time. Then success would encourage them to repeat the operation. That is when they would be caught.

The Khan had sensibly decided to pay and get his son back. Although officially advising against paying the ransom, Antoine Rombach was secretly delighted. No long-winded media ploy, no embarrassment to the French government. A quickly forgotten affair. This evening there would be a happy, reunited family.

At five-thirty Mohammed Kemal Khan came and sat on

a wooden bench around a concrete flowerpot bursting with gold marigolds. The Khan smiled grimly to himself – the funeral flower of South Asia was a fitting omen of the kidnapers' fate. He sat thus for twenty-five minutes, reading a Time magazine. On his lap was a small, slim briefcase. It contained two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in mixed denomination notes. The scoundrels had been adamant that *he* – and only *he* – bring the money. Alone, unarmed, and without police surveillance. The Khan had agreed.

Presuming that the briefcase in which he had been given the ransom would be bugged, he had immediately transferred the money into another one.

His two Tarang bodyguards had gone into a series of aggressive and diversionary moves to ensure that there was no surveillance. He was now alone, but there were four crack snipers hidden in apartments around the Place Grenette. After all, incoming calls had been listened to, and the police knew of the first rendezvous. It would have been unnatural for them not to have staked it out. The surrounding streets had teams in cars and on motorbikes ready for discreet surveillance or interception. They expected to do neither. Kidnappers of modest appetites and tight timetables would be unlikely to provide the opportunity, but police forces like to follow their basic procedures, and so they were there.

The Khan had been told not to look up from his magazine, and he didn't. His son's life was too precious to lose over a gesture of idle curiosity. When the paper plane landed on his magazine, he was as surprised as the men with cross-hairs on their telescopes looking for

## BLOOD MONEY

a hostile target they could never shoot at because as usual, at this hour, Place Grenette was a swarm of milling people. There was writing on the paper plane. It was typed in English.

“Go into the phone box behind you and wait for a call.”

There was an elderly gentleman in the phone box. He finished in less than a minute. Nobody else waiting. His hands clammy with fear and hatred, the Khan entered the phone box and shut the door. The watching snipers knew they wouldn't have a target – not even one they *couldn't* shoot at. A call in a phone box meant another rendezvous, but they remained watchful until further orders. They were men of the same Élite unit that had advised the Saudis when insurgents had seized the Mecca in 1980.

Two seconds after the Khan shut the door, the phone rang. The same terse English voice.

“There's an envelope taped under the telephone. Remove it casually and discreetly while pretending to talk to me. Then go back to the bench and sit down. After five minutes, go to the automatic toilet and read it. There's a coin for the toilet taped to the envelope.”

The phone clicked off. The Khan felt under the telephone, removed the envelope, put the coin and envelope casually in his pocket. When the watchers saw the Khan go back and resume reading, they were perplexed.

Five minutes after sitting down, the Khan looked at his watch again – he'd been counting the seconds. He crossed and uncrossed his legs, looked at his watch again when he was sure the second hand had made

exactly five revolutions. He stood up and walked the ten paces to the public loo. It was a prefabricated, modern structure with a sliding metal door. State of the art, with automatic flushing and theme music for the user. The light was green. He fished the two franc coin out of his pocket and inserted it in the slot. Noiselessly, the door opened to admit him. Inside, he pressed another button to shut it. The light and music came on automatically. Tchaikovsky filled the plastic and metallic cabinet. It was the last bar of the Death of the Swans. He put the briefcase on the seat, and opened the envelope. There was a key, which he put in the inside pocket of his suit jacket. There was also a note. The note instructed:

*Go into the Galleries Lafayette. Take the escalator up to the third floor. Wander on the floor for one minute. Make sure you're not followed. Take the stairs to the fifth floor. Wander around until the lift's free. Call the elevator, press the button for the ground floor. When you reach the ground floor, press the button for the cellars. Walk straight through the service section and you'll come out in the rue Bressieux. Take a tram to the railway station. The key opens a locker.*

Thirty minutes later, the Khan was at the station. Like the tight timetable and terse phone calls, the preceding steps in the Galleries Lafayette had been designed as much to throw off surveillance as to frazzle his nerves. The tactic succeeded in doing both.

Inside the locker was a small Motorola, single frequency radio receiver the size of his palm. The instructions told him to go out of the station, cross the road to the Avis office, and hire a car – the first one

## BLOOD MONEY

available. In the car, he was to switch the radio on and follow instructions. It was seven p.m.

The Signals Exercise in the headquarters of the *Chasseurs Alpains* started at seven p.m. The *Chasseurs Alpains* are crack high altitude Alpine troops reputed for efficiency and a high-achievement battle record. They form part of the French rapid action force – *Force d'Action Rapide* – with experience ranging from Beirut to the Gulf. A normal signals exercise involves only officers and their signals staff. No troops are involved. This exercise, code-named 'Snoopy' by an Anglophile staff officer with a sense of humor and two small children, was designed merely to test the latest Electronic Warfare equipment issued to the Alpine Corps. The Elysée Palace had displayed an unusual personal interest, which the general officers found flattering. The Elysée had gone so far as to suggest they might want to spot-jam Grenoble's police frequencies from seven to nine. The Signals Major was delighted. He hated the police, having paid too many fines for speeding. He would enjoy letting his staff loose on them.

The team selected to shadow the Khan were furious. They had lost him in the Galleries Lafayette. Not a trained spy, the Khan proved himself adept at shaking off trained police officers. He had motivation enough, and as head of the *Halqa*, nerves of steel. At ten to seven, there was increased radio traffic on the police

bands, which included very foul language. At seven, the swearing died down for the simple reason that there was a peculiar and indefinable malfunction in the wireless sets. A strange, high-pitched whine came and went irregularly. The sound seemed to pierce the ears and stab the brain. The police communications officer vaguely remembered an article in the magazine *Science et Vie* which mentioned the possibility of jamming equipment capable of achieving this effect. Then he dismissed the thought with a shake of his head. Only the Americans were supposed to have this sort of stuff, and why the hell would they want to jam Grenoble's police frequencies? That's it! Must be some equipment somewhere – a satellite perhaps – gone haywire. He told his assistant to put in a report with the French Space Agency. He decided to inform *Monsieur le Préfet* personally.

Mohammed Kemal Khan gunned the red Golf GTI past the station, heading North-West. The ransom money was on the seat beside him, and the little radio set on top of it. It crackled, but the transmission was clear. Same curt English voice of Abdul the Man-eater of the Guardians of the Revolution, scoundrel extraordinaire and soon to be hunted by every clandestine organization connected with the *Halqa*. Once located, he would wipe this scum of the face of the planet.

He obeyed the instructions to the letter, including the one not to break the speed limit. The instructions could only come from visual surveillance, but in the traffic behind, it was hard to guess who it could be. He

## BLOOD MONEY

was now in the foothills North of Grenoble, heading towards the Chartreuse. Behind him there was no discernible surveillance, even though the traffic was thinner. Two cars, a little van and a motorcycle. The road forked, and the instruction came clearly.

“Take the left one.”

He did accordingly, and wondered which of the vehicles behind him held Abdul the Man-eater – or was it an electronic bug in the Golf? If that was the case, then the conspiracy included the Avis set-up in Grenoble. It was possible, but not probable. That would mean a scale of operation disproportionate to the ransom demanded. This was a clean up and get out bunch. What were they getting? Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars carried by him – *him!* **Him!** And suddenly all the inconsistencies seemed to make sense. This was an isolate-and-eliminate. He was the head of the *Halqa*, and the *Halqa* was on the verge of its biggest coup. The merger with Clean-Alpes, the penetration into the Western media, the financial power of the diamonds and the force of the team in Gunda – the West would cease to exist in its omnipotent splendor. Yet, at this stage, if he was killed, Operation Yarmouk would die with him.

The road wound up the mountains. A sign told him he was coming into Le Sappey, a smart village and an almost-suburb of Grenoble. He was ordered to stop by the post office for a minute, then in front of the town hall. Abdul the assassin making sure he was a clear target? Allah alone knew. Yes, and if he was the target, his son would be unharmed. *Rustam would live!* As he changed down and stepped on the throttle to take



another bend, his brain worked furiously. It was the same brain that had spawned the *Halqa* and had Western agencies chasing their tails.

If they wanted him, they had no interest in killing Rustam. Rustam was the bait, and he the target. The sum of the ransom acquired another significance. It indicated a hired gun for whom the ransom was bonus, and Rustam the bait. The Khan was a gambler. If he hadn't been one, he wouldn't even have thought of the *Halqa*. His mind went as cold as a Karakorum viper's blood. He would gamble his life and perhaps his son's life, too.

The countryside was beautiful – not yet majestic, but beautiful. The bends rose again and again, and he knew from reading and a study of maps that they were headed towards the Chartreuse monastery. He also knew that the Chartreuse monks were said to have forged Charlemagne's sword that had carved the Western empire in the 8th century. He hissed. It was an appropriate place for a decisive duel between Islam and Christendom.

The frequency of the bends and helplessness of his situation did not allow him to spot his guide. He had to be patient. The sky was cloudy and overcast, but there was no rain yet. The roads were dry and he was at a steady eighty when the road dipped. The motorbike suddenly came around the bend behind him and overtook him with a roar. It was a lean beast in dazzling chrome. Youth lost in a radical cause lurched in the Khan's heart. The rider became a blur in just two seconds, then was lost to view around the next fork. Just before the fork with the left hand turn leading to

## BLOOD MONEY

the Chartreuse monastery, he received instructions to turn right, go through the village of St Pierre de Chartreuse and follow the road going to St Pierre d'Entremont. A mile ahead of St Pierre, he received his last instructions by radio: "Carry on until you see a man next to a Honda bike by the side of the road. Then follow him."

*It had been the biker!* Kemal saw red, then fought to control himself.

Johnny Kilvington roared past the Golf GTI without a glance at the driver. He was living real time, and the time here and now was overtaking the Golf. He leaned his body right, getting back in front of the small car. He was alone against the wind. The Honda 750cc he had appropriated from the Rabot Halls had been superbly maintained by its student owner. The sound of the wind, its force, was something living against his body. It wasn't the wind coming at him. It was more like a solid but invisible wall he was cutting a swathe through. The road rose and dipped with its alpine bends under the benign silence of pine forests interspersed with wood and stone chalets. His body was an extension of the earth, in affinity with the Chartreuse desert. Charlemagne's Western Empire had had the benediction of the Cartusian precursors of the Chartreuse order, piously forging the royal épée with prayers. It was fitting that this drama end here, and now. Two men would face each other in a forest glade and stare down the sum of their existence.

The setting sun was behind the hills. The light and

shadows played a deadly game over the valley. The sky had suddenly cleared. Johnny eased the throttle at the fork before the D512 and the D102B. Johnny leaned his body into the bend and took the right-hand fork. The road dipped deeply. He changed down, and the bike snarled and snorted like a Himalayan leopard going in for a kill. He went over a small bridge that spanned a mountain stream sparkling over stones polished smooth by time. Dappled shadows surrounded his entry into the *Forêt des Fraisses*. His body leaned left into the bend, he changed down, then throttled up to take the steep rise, and over it the narrow road dipped down again. Just before the next rise and bend he brought the bike to a smooth halt at the side of the road, engine running. Next to him was another small rivulet of sparkling pristine water that danced in infinite anticipation with the light and shadows of the thick forest. The trees on his right had been elbowed back by a logger's trail now run over with underbrush. It would be only discernible to a highly skilled woodsman or a commando. Johnny didn't look back, just watched the rear-view mirror without taking his helmet off. A tiny red speck appeared in it, then grew larger as the Khan's malevolence raced down and loomed into a Golf GTI. Johnny signaled casually and swung his machine into the light and shadows infinity with the cold-blooded confidence of his profession. Crocuses, bluebells and dandelions raised their tufts in his path. The rolling wheel of his bike crushed them. Behind him the double swish and suspension creaks of the blood-red Golf dared the timeless forest in indefinable challenge. The scent of pines and wild flowers dominated the lovers'

## BLOOD MONEY

breeze.

The track opened onto a sylvan glade of Arcadian charm. The crags of proud cliffs pierced the sky far above. The grass had been flattened by an invisible scythe sharpened on a cosmic whetstone. There were daffodils and bluebells, and a little brook murmuring over primeval stone, and a stack of deadwood outside the old logger's cabin. The butterflies lent it the idyllic innocence of a ceramic inspired by Beatrix Potter or A.A. Milne. There were wild poppies everywhere.

Johnny turned the bike to face the way he had come, cut the engine and flicked the side stand down with a casual movement of his foot. He raised a hand and the slow-moving mass of red bounced to a halt five meters from him. The grill of the Golf radiated malevolence, and the blind eyes of the twin headlights were a flat stare. Icy calm flowed in Johnny's veins, and his brain was as clear and uncluttered as an academic's.

The Khan of Gunda cut the engine of the car, and silence enveloped the glade. The light was deceptive and the lengthening shadows of the trees menacing. The two men looked at each other and hatred flowed from the Khan like a living organism. Kemal Khan could almost smell the lion scent coming from the man opposite him who sat astride his motorbike like a Medieval knight of vengeance on an armored charger. The feel of the knife strapped to his calf was comforting. His bodyguards had been adamant. He would not go without a Khyber knife, and Rehana had

personally shaved his calf before taping the ancestral blade with its lethal sting insured by a dip in the venom of the Karakorum viper. The Khan's antennae zinged and crossed signals pierced his ears.

"Get out of the car with the ransom" the English voice commanded. *Why?* Kemal Khan's head screamed and his brain jumped light-years backwards and forwards. Logically, the kidnapper would have asked him to sit in the car with his hands visible on the steering wheel.

Kemal Khan slowly and carefully got out of the car, shutting the door.

A shutter clicked in Johnny's brain. *Why did he shut the door? He knows!*

"Turn around, feet apart and put the briefcase on the bonnet ... now flick it open."

Johnny approached and stood beside the Khan.

"Your son is safe. Make a silly move, and he dies. My partner can receive on the same radio I used to give you orders."

The Khan's brain whirled. He said *partner*, and *on the same frequency* meant short distance, which meant his son wasn't far. This *was* an assassination otherwise he wouldn't have been ordered out of the car. He could gamble, one chance in a million, and save the *Halqa* and his son – maybe one, maybe neither.

"Abdul the Man-eater," he mocked the helmeted figure counting notes with his thin gloved hands. "You're a hired assassin. Guardians of the Revolution. A two-man mercenary team hoping to kill me. That's why you ordered me out of the car."

"Shut up!" Johnny said laconically, continuing to

## BLOOD MONEY

count the notes, not looking in the Khan's direction, knowing he had his arms and legs spread-eagled, certain he would make no move until the sudden feel of the ice-cold blade in his kidneys.

"Go on, kill in cold blood, you pathetic fake."

"Like your assassins, sent out by the *Halqa*, leaving a trail of widows and orphans in their wake – and your friends' bombs that maim and kill innocent travelers?"

Johnny's voice was unhurried, devoid of anger – more amused than anything else.

"So, Mister Commando Assassin, you know about that, and the *Halqa*!"

The Khan's intestines were twisted into a knot. They knew about the *Halqa* and obviously the merger. All their plans were known. *He had to live! These vermin must be destroyed and the purity of the JUST restored.*

"Your mother is a whore who used to stand in Edgeware Road waiting to fuck Paki factory workers so she could buy you ..."

Johnny put the notes in a brown plastic bag, zipped it up, and double-kicked sideways. Two severe blows delivered to the Khan's left calf, which would have been disabling if they hadn't been contemptuous.

The Khan cried out in pain. He groaned and his hands slid down the painted surface of the metal. He clutched his right calf with both hands.

Right calf!

Johnny moved and the poisoned Khyber knife zipped past him with a hair's breadth and quivered in the earth between two wild poppies.

The Khan charged Johnny, who side-stepped neatly. The Khan's own momentum sent him sprawling.

He fell near the knife and his hand closed over the hilt. In one move he grabbed the knife and sprang to his feet with serpentine rapidity. His calf hurt, but he crouched in front of Johnny, blade held out for a gutting slash. He swayed from side to side, like a cobra before its prey. The gutting slash would be delivered from within the hypnotic swaying.

Johnny stood still, feet apart, hands down by his side, contempt and challenge in his stance. He ignored the Camillus under his armpit and waited.

The Khan's hand forked out of the hypnotic sway. With the grace of a ballet dancer, Johnny pivoted left, his upper body swayed back from the waist, and his left arm made two blurring moves executed with the single rapidity of a boxer's double left jab. The stiff fingers of his left hand hit the Khan under the right armpit with deadly accuracy, efficiently dislocating the shoulder. Before the agony could transmit itself to the knife hand, Johnny's left hand immobilized the Khan's right bicep and his right hand locked the Khan's right forearm and turned it with the grip half an inch from the Khan's throat.

Time stood still. The Khan's face twisted with pain and his eyes bulged with terror – unreasonable terror. It was then Johnny noticed the lightly darkened tip of the knife. It had been dipped in poison. His lips curled in a cruel smile under his helmet. He exerted a little more pressure. The tip delicately rested on the Khan's jugular. Despite the wrenching pain from his shoulder, the Khan went absolutely still. The slightest scratch would be mortal, with a degrading death.

Johnny released the grip on the Khan's biceps and

## BLOOD MONEY

flicked his visor up.

“Take a good look, mister *Halqa*. Not an assassin. A commando commissioned by Western governments in discharge of his contractual duties,” he stated matter-of-factly, a schoolteacher correcting a pupil’s error.

The words had a catalytic effect. The Khan’s last, desperate burst of energy aimed at Johnny served only to ease the knife’s poisoned tip gently into his own jugular.

Overtaken by the poison and his own terror, the Khan’s body went limp. Johnny released it and it slid onto the soft grass in a heap, spasming violently. The poison would swiftly course the blood-stream before paralyzing the nervous system. Fighting against it, the body would discolor and contract horribly, sucking the walls of his stomach flat against against each other, pushing out the thorax with a blackened tongue and eyes popping out of their sockets, and perhaps releasing the sphincter.

Johnny got on the motorbike and slowly moved out of the forest’s embrace, with *miles to go before I sleep* beating soft tattoo in his head. When he turned right onto the D-road, he gave four clicks on the transmitter.

Three miles on, he turned left into the sleepy little village of St Philibert d’Entremont.

Inside the van, Nathalie had received the four clicks. That meant that the *Halqa*’s Operation Yarmouk was dead. Leaving Rustam tied and gagged, she ran outside the van in her biker’s overalls, helmet on her head. Nobody was about. From the phone box, she



made a short call. In a few minutes, or more, the Schengen Group would confirm the destruction of Operation Yarmouk. In the meantime, she had a rendezvous with life.

The Chartreuse breeze carried the sound of a motorbike engine half a mile away. Back inside the van, she undid Rustam's bonds and waited beside him. Johnny's bike turned into the square in front of the church. She hopped out with Rustam, pointed to the church and said to the boy: "Go to the church, bang loudly on the door and scream for help. You will be rescued. Goodbye, and good luck."

The bike had turned around and was still in motion when Nathalie hopped onto the back with her heart singing. Johnny took off in a half-wheelie and the bike roared past Madame Guillot's cottage. A retired village librarian, she looked out of her window in annoyance. What was that frightened little boy doing outside the church? She had better go down and see.

Slightly over a mile further on, Johnny turned left into the abandoned timber yard. Behind the central shed, he and Nathalie threw their helmets aside and kissed deeply, hungrily. With controlled urgency they unzipped their overalls and cast them next to the helmets. The zip-up biker's boots joined them. Underneath, they both wore the soft Guccis, designer jeans and expensive cashmere sweaters of the real and really rich. Johnny bent over his overalls and recovered the brown plastic

## BLOOD MONEY

folder with the money. Wordlessly, without wasting a second, they went to the dark-green Mercedes 190 parked in the central shed. It was a symbol of the Euro-yuppie, and had been hired by Nessimi's man in the name of Mr and Mrs Goodall. The passports, driving licenses and air tickets were perfect, as were the Vuitton bags into one of which Johnny slipped the plastic folder. Two wigs and tinted Polaroid glasses waited on the seats, and the keys were in the ignition.

At a light touch from Johnny, the waiting engine purred to life. They looked at each other. Yes, her man was back. Her chin tilted with grateful pride. They kissed and he whispered: "*and miles to go before I sleep.*"

"You *will* sleep, my love. With me."

He engaged gear and pressed the throttle. The Mercedes surged out in the direction of Geneva. They had a plane to catch.

The helicopter was unable to land in the glade, but Agatha and professor Dufour could see the red Golf and a body twisted in a horrible rictus of death. The pilot circled over the trees, and managed to land across the road. Accompanied by two tough gendarmes of the crack anti-terrorist unit, Agatha and the professor reached the glade. One of the black-overalled gendarmes pushed the body over with his boot. They both blanched. The effect of a Karakorum viper's poison on the human body is indescribable. Agatha and the professor fought to retain their composure. They exchanged tight-faced nods, Dufour unable to speak.

“Yes, identification is positive. Operation Poitiers can be activated.” The professor nodded, then stepped a few paces away and gagged. The men of the GIGN didn’t blame him. Only their rigorous training held them back from doing the same.

Agatha pushed the bile down with the controlled effort of a seasoned intelligence officer, knelt, and worked the combination of a slim burgundy briefcase. The lid rose to reveal a state-of-the-art transmitter. She punched the code 732 twice.

The slim wireless receiver in front of the General blinked six times. He pressed a button. The figures 732 appeared on the screen, then reappeared followed by ACTIVATE OPERATION POITIERS. He obediently punched in another code, which would alert the White House. Then he gave a crisp order that unleashed the NSA technicians knotted in front of their consoles.

In the infinite emptiness of space, the satellite orbited in silence. It was a billion-dollars’ worth of electronic wizardry. One of its over one million microprocessors received the NSA laser signal. With the discipline of programmed obedience, the microprocessor shot three hundred separate and coded signals along the maze of circuits within the satellite. The satellite locked onto a penny-size target 700 kilometers down on earth. A single laser beam shot down.

## BLOOD MONEY

The exposed short length of cable running outside the Gunda palace warped, then short-circuited. There was a flash, and puffs of smoke that went unnoticed. Some lights went out, but there was no alarm. The first explosion came from the cellar, which blew up the generator and plunged the palace into darkness. The stocks of petrol went up two seconds later, but the time difference was only theoretical.

The people of Zehamatabad, the capital, were shocked out of their houses. The thousand-year eyrie of the assassins of Gunda was auto-destructing in a diabolical display of pyrotechnics. Operation Yarmouk had short-circuited.

The *Halqa* had reached the end of its existence.

## EPILOGUE

In her brother Musharraf's sumptuous Lahore mansion in Gulberg, Bushra Butt wiped the last of the Kashmiri *shabdegh* with her *Nan* bread. Rubina, her sister-in-law, smiled with satisfaction. Bushra, Islam's holy warrior, had obviously enjoyed the Kashmiri delicacy of lamb shin and garden parsnips sealed in a clay pot and simmered overnight with herbs and curry spices in a *tandoor* oven.

The phone rang.

A hovering servant in white livery and turban picked it up, said hello. He deferentially brought it to Bushra across the expanse of an elegant Kashmiri silk carpet.

"For you, *bibi-ji*," he said, using the respectful title commensurate with her rank.

Bushra took the phone.

She listened, and her face went pale. She dismissed the servant with a wave.

Musharraf and Rubina could only hear the respectful affirmations of "*ha'an-ji!*"

Bushra gave a long-drawn-out sigh of *Alla'ah* and put the phone down on the table.

She looked as though she had just come back from hell. Her brother reached out, and she ran from the room.

## BLOOD MONEY

In the bathroom she retched again and again, oblivious to the stench of curry spices and vomit, while her brain beat a steady tattoo – *it'll have to be the women it'll have to be the women madrassahs training camps infiltration the womenthewomen...*

Fabled hippy Mecca of the Sixties for its sun, sand, palm trees, jeweled beaches and a liberal lifestyle, Goa lies on the West coast of the Indian peninsula. Arambol is a small village at its North West tip, thirty-five kilometers from Mapusa, the nearest market town. Access to the beaches is gained by following a stony track. Soft white sand and coconut palms are protected from intrusion by steep cliffs. In the rough and simply equipped cabins, it is possible to live for a long time on a short budget. Many members of this close community are naturalists. They are all laid-back, free-spirited and close-knit.

The 'Canadian couple' quietly blended into the Arambol scene.

Nathalie rubbed her naked body against Johnny's back. He slowly came to wakefulness. The early morning sunlight gently filtered through the mosquito net. Eyes still half closed, he turned over and kissed her. She rolled over and straddled him.

Later, they lay back, caressing, exchanging affectionate kisses.

"Johnny, *ma chérie*?"

"Mmmm?"

"How long d'you think all this will last?"

"Dollars to rupees?"

"*Eh ben?* Why the scowl?"

## AZAM GILL

She leaned forward and kissed it.

“Blood money, Nathalie. The Schengen Group. If they need us, they’ll find us. The money might last longer than we will.”

Elsewhere, one phase of a centuries-old struggle to control world destiny had failed – for the time being. The remnants of the *Halqa* were already donning other garb, to plan their next surprise from the least imaginable location, playing on perception of space.

Rehana assumed the regency of Gunda. Doctor Hackworth accompanied her as a privileged resident companion. She tends her father’s grave and regularly visits the British Council in Islamabad, where her nephew is Director. A keen naturalist and photographer, on his visits to Gunda he also contributes richly to discussions on its planned reforms

...

With Rustam, the future ruler, an avid listener.

## THE END

## Author's Notes

Although some characters, organizations and even states mentioned in my novel are portrayed as fictional, this is not to deny the fact that they exist under other names. The work is inspired by, and based upon cold, hard, frightening facts: some of them – keystones in the book you have just read – are these:

\*Assassination by intelligence services as a last-resort policy is as old as history and as new as tomorrow's newspaper.

\*The French Foreign Légion is France's crème-de-la-crème of combatants. It is not unusual to find former officers of the world's renowned special forces serving as enlisted men. Their expertise is honed by the Légion to form a cohesive unit that serves the Western alliance.

\*Not all Légion operations are acknowledged.

\*During the Falklands war, an SBS patrol and an SAS patrol – Britain's top, semi-secret crack commando units – were landed on an iceberg, neither having received a warning about the other. There is said to have been a firefight.

\*The Bank of Credit and Commerce International, BCCI, which collapsed in 1991, was founded by a Pakistani. According to Time Magazine, BCCI was "a



vast, stateless, multinational corporation that deploys its own intelligence agency, complete with a paramilitary wing and enforcement units, known collectively as the Black Network.” BCCI’s “Black Network” is suspected of involvement in at least sixteen suspicious deaths. According to *Online Journal*, Bin Laden’s network and BCCI bear a “striking resemblance.”

\*There is an NGO to clean up mountains all over the world. Any such NGO can be infiltrated for nefarious purposes. Shortly before 11 September 2001, The Hindustan Times claimed that President Musharraf of Pakistan was one of the directors of a charitable trust on the American government’s list of organizations with terrorist links.

\*The Northern Areas of Pakistan consist of small, isolated valleys, each a semi-autonomous state with its own hereditary ruler. They do not share a single language, and claim ancient Indo-European ancestry, displaying redoubtable battlefield qualities. Until very recently, it was forbidden to enter these states. Even now, foreign climbing expeditions are accompanied to base camp by an intelligence-briefed army officer.

\*According to Indian intelligence sources, Pakistani mountain valleys are home to over fifty terrorist training camps. There might be many, many more. You see, it is not yet established that the secret order of the Old Man of the Mountains and his Assassins has ever been disbanded.

\* In 1978-79 a foreign conglomerate reportedly put in a bid to explore diamond deposits in the near-impenetrable Northern Areas. Bazaar rumour claimed the deposits were so vast they would lower world price

## BLOOD MONEY

... so alternative financial arrangements were reportedly made to compensate for leaving the gems where they were.

\*As far back as the Sixties, the public was informed that the CIA used missionaries and priests when and where it served its interests. Just because the CIA admits this, doesn't mean other agencies don't have the same work ethic, but stay tight-lipped.

\*Since 1985, the Group of Seven and the European Union has been declaring its intention of establishing a joint centre of excellence in counter-terrorism.

\*The interest of intelligence services from Washington to Moscow in parapsychology is established fact.

Other important points in the novel are also seated in established truth:

\*The statue of Bayard, the Medieval French knight, stands at the Place St André, Grenoble. During World War Two, it was spirited away by the Resistance to prevent the Nazis from stealing it. I had the honour of renting a flat from Monsieur Coreard, who is supposed to have organized this operation. Needless to say, he would never reveal the secret hiding place.

\*The Bastille overlooking Grenoble is built over a rabbit warren of little-known and unmapped tunnels surrounded by monk's eyries dug into the mountainside. The spring fair is held at the esplanade at the foot of the Bastille.

\*Grenoble is a major nerve centre of the Franco-Italian Mafia.

\*The precursors of the order of Chartreuse monks are credited with having forged Charlemagne's sword, associating them with the tradition and dream of Europe's First Reich. Other monastic orders are known to have sheltered Nazi war criminals, notably Klaus Barbie, the Butcher of Lyons.

Several factors in the novel are also much more than the mere result of a writer's imagination:

\*Your author has a specialist's grasp of commando tactics and operations that goes beyond merely training for them. As a young officer commissioned in the Punjab Regiment of the Pakistan Army, I successively served as Intelligence Officer, Company Commander and Regimental Adjutant. Apart from patrolling and fire fights with warriors of my own blood and race under Indian colors, I was responsible for the crossing of spies through my sector.

\*Subsequently, I joined the French Foreign Légion, whose ranks include beggars and princes. From France to Africa, I lived and worked with people whose backgrounds included clandestine work, criminal activity, and intellectual pursuits, what Len Deighton describes as "a fiction writer's dream."

\*Even now, I am on instruction secondment to the French Navy, and my students include combat swimmers from Commando Hubert, counterpart of the renowned British Special Boat Service.

\*During and since my Légion days, I have been a regular customer at the *real* Chez Hans bar, which does indeed exist in Marseilles.

## BLOOD MONEY

Elements of any novel must, to an extent, be a muted expression of an author's innermost, heart wrung, private thoughts. My own – *personal* – feelings include these:

\*Operations like the bombing of the Twin Towers on September 11 cannot be organized overnight. It takes more than just a handful of blood-thirsty fanatics to perform acts of barbaric mischief and then put the blame on the West's failure to improve the socio-economic conditions of Islamic states. Most of those involved in the barbarity, of course, were from Saudi Arabia ... not a country known for its poverty.

\*So, I believe Islamic ambition is independent of socio-economic conditions and transcends time, space or theological schisms. Islamists cannot spin a "global web" on the basis of a bunch of thugs alone. They are now into information warfare and operate comfortably in cyberspace.

\*From Gibraltar to Poitiers to the Battle of Yarmouk (which destroyed the Christian Byzantine empire) two sieges of Vienna, the Turkish empire in East Europe, and on to modern times, Islamic ambition and belief in a world destiny is common to all the schisms of Islam. In more recent times, fundamentalist thinkers from Jalaluddin Afghani in the 19<sup>th</sup> century down to Mowdoodi in the 20<sup>th</sup>, have further reinforced this thinking.

## AZAM GILL

Also, this work is a fictional synthesis of my deep research into geopolitics and international terrorism, published in my book, *Winds of Change: Geopolitics and the World Order*.

No more than any other author do I seek to instruct or indoctrinate in these pages – merely to entertain the intelligent minds of those who read my lines and give food for thought to those who might also read *between* them. I hope to suggest how the fearsome terrorist reality of the past foreshadowed the shattering terrorist reality of the present.

We cannot – will not – accept the defeatist advice given in 1892 by Rudyard Kipling:

*When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains  
And the women come out to cut up what remains  
Just roll to your rifle and blow out your brains  
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.*

Those inseparable twins, love and hope, represented by Johnny and Nathalie in my book *will* prevail.

Even as I write these closing words, I hear on my radio that the Twin Towers of New York are to be rebuilt – taller than ever!

Azam Gill – Grenoble 2002

*Also Available from BeWrite Books*

***Crime***

**Sweet Molly Maguire – Terry Houston**

The surreal world of a mean city newspaper swallowed the very toughest or spat them out. This circus of hopeless drunks and heartless back-stabbers was no place for Sweet Molly Maguire. She died, raped and pregnant, and didn't merit a single line of print. But for one reporter, her death wasn't the end of just another story. It was the opening sentence in a search for something rare in the news room ... the bitter truth.

Paperback            ISBN 1-904224-05-9  
                          \$13.50 US/ £9.80 UK/ \$21.24 Canada/ €15.55 Europe  
Ebook                ISBN 1-904224-01-6  
                          \$6.55 US/ £4.80 UK/ \$10.40 Canada/ €7.65 Europe  
CD – Rom            ISBN 1-904224-06-7  
                          \$10.25 US/ £7.50 UK/ \$16.25 Canada/ €11.90 Europe

***Horror***

**Chill – Terri Pine, Peter Lee, Andrew Müller**

Dim the lights. Tug up the quilt so that only your eyes are visible. Now, slip into the dark, dark night of this world's greatest masters of macabre. Try not to sleep. Watch for moving shadows. And – whatever happens – *don't* get out of bed ... you may catch your very death ...

Paperback            ISBN 1-904224-08-3  
                          \$13.50 US/ £9.80 UK/ \$21.24 Canada/ €15.55 Europe  
Ebook                ISBN 1-904224-03-2  
                          \$6.55 US/ £4.80 UK/ \$10.40 Canada/ €7.65 Europe  
CD – Rom            ISBN 1-904224-11-3  
                          \$10.25 US/ £7.50 UK/ \$16.25 Canada/ €11.90 Europe

## ***Crime***

### **Marks – Sam Smith**

George Hawkins is a small town detective – low on ambition, lower on glamour. The most exciting part of life is making midnight chalk marks on tyres and roads ... when the marks still match up the following morning, he has proof that someone's been playing away from home. But George's humdrum life is turned upside down within a single day when he witnesses a hit-and-run, his house is burgled, and his girlfriend disappears, leaving him prime suspect.

Paperback	ISBN 1-904224-09-1
	\$13.50 US/ £9.80 UK/ \$21.24 Canada/ €15.55 Europe
Ebook	ISBN 1-904224-02-4
	\$6.55 US/ £4.80 UK/ \$10.40 Canada/ €7.65 Europe
CD – Rom	ISBN 1-904224-17-2
	\$10.25 US/ £7.50 UK/ \$16.25 Canada/ €11.90 Europe

## ***Autobiography***

### **The Golden Locket – A Post-Edwardian Childhood – Dorothy Kathleen Kirby**

It may not have mattered to Dorothy Kathleen Kirby that she didn't live to see the book she had written. She had *lived* the memories between its covers. In nine decades that saw the Flanders trenches and the terror attack on Manhattan, Dorothy focused on the simple detail of everyday life, and discovered a wonderful world. Page by delightful page, you cannot help but be struck by the truth that counting blessings one by one can produce a mighty sum.

Paperback	ISBN 1-904224-07-5
	\$13.50 US/ £9.80 UK/ \$21.24 Canada/ €15.55 Europe
Ebook	ISBN 1-904224-00-8
	\$6.55 US/ £4.80 UK/ \$10.40 Canada/ €7.65 Europe
CD – Rom	ISBN 1-904224-10-5
	\$10.25 US/ £7.50 UK/ \$16.25 Canada/ €11.90 Europe

## ***Crime***

### **The Knotted Cord – Alistair Kinnon**

The body of a naked young boy hanging in a dusty barn stirs sickening feelings of déjà vu in the detective. As he untangles each knot in the tangled cord of his investigation, he uncovers a murderous thread ... and police prejudices which may have allowed previous killings to happen ... not to mention his own guilt! **Alistair Kinnon** has written much more than a tense, psychological crime novel -- his twisting plot takes the reader into the murky world of child sex-for-sale ... the parent's darkest nightmare and the child's greatest threat.

Paperback ISBN 1-904224-12-1  
\$13.50 US/ £9.80 UK/ \$21.24 Canada/ €15.55 Europe  
Ebook ISBN 1-904224-04-1  
\$6.55 US/ £4.80 UK/ \$10.40 Canada/ €7.65 Europe  
CD – Rom ISBN 1-904224-13-X  
\$10.25 US/ £7.50 UK/ \$16.25 Canada/ €11.90 Europe

## ***Fantasy Humour***

### **Zolin – A Rockin' Good Wizard – Barry Ireland**

Worlds go along happily side-by-side in their own dimensions ... until they accidentally bump into each other. Then a wild Glasgow rock band, randy witches, dragons for hire and kings and queens end up rocking where they should have been rolling. And bewildered apprentice wizard, Zolin, is piggy in the middle. **Barry Ireland's** book is to Fantasy what The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy was to Sci Fi. An adult fairy tale!

Paperback ISBN 1-904224-19-9  
\$13.50 US/ £9.80 UK/ \$21.24 Canada/ €15.55 Europe  
Ebook ISBN 1-904224-18-0  
\$6.55 US/ £4.80 UK/ \$10.40 Canada/ €7.65 Europe  
CD – Rom ISBN 1-904224-20-2  
\$10.25 US/ £7.50 UK/ \$16.25 Canada/ €11.90 Europe



## ***Romance***

### **A Different Kind of Love – Jay Mandal**

More than any other collection, this thought-provoking work will introduce the heterosexual reader to the meaning of *true* gay love, and will afford the gay reader a sigh of relief that – at last – a popular, respected and serious author has cast aside threadbare issues of hatred, brutality, perversion, prejudice and misunderstanding to get to the very heart of the matter ... the honest to goodness love between human beings who ask little more of life than that.

Paperback            ISBN 1-904224-40-7  
                          \$13.50 US/ £9.80 UK/ \$21.24 Canada/ €15.55 Europe  
Ebook                ISBN 1-904224-39-9  
                          \$6.55 US/ £4.80 UK/ \$10.40 Canada/ €7.65 Europe  
CD – Rom            ISBN 1-904224-41-5  
                          \$10.25 US/ £7.50 UK/ \$16.25 Canada/ €11.90 Europe

## ***General***

### **Odie Dodie – The Life and Crimes of a Travelin’ Preacher Man – Lad Moore**

Lad Moore builds a collection of tales of stark reality, hanging on the wobbly hook of a phony, money grubbing, licentious gospel-peddler, Odie Dodie and his unholy glory bus.

Never since Steinbeck and Hemingway has an author written so tightly, entertainingly and honestly about what matters most ... The simple truth!

Paperback            ISBN 1-904224-08-3  
                          \$13.50 US/ £9.80 UK/ \$21.24 Canada/ €15.55 Europe  
Ebook                ISBN 1-904224-03-2  
                          \$6.55 US/ £4.80 UK/ \$10.40 Canada/ €7.65 Europe  
CD – Rom            ISBN 1-904224-11-3  
                          \$10.25 US/ £7.50 UK/ \$16.25 Canada/ €11.90 Europe

***Coming Soon***

**Porlock Counterpoint – Sam Smith**

**The Fat Moon Dance – Elizabeth Taylor**

**Spartacus Thorn – Dazz Jackson**

**Kitchen Sink Concert – Ishbel Moore**

**Rules Of The Hunt – Hugh McCracken**

**The Secret Portal – Reno Charlton**

**A Stranger and Afraid – Arthur Allwright**

N.B The price for paperback and CD-Rom excludes postage and packaging. Prices correct at time of press.

**All the above titles are available from**

[www.bewrite.net](http://www.bewrite.net)

