PROLOGUE

THE BACK GARDEN

THE SCARY PART, Jack decided, was going to be driving. He'd already bought a Jaguar—pronounced *jag-you-ah* over here, he'd have to remember—but both times he'd walked to it at the dealership, he'd gone to the left-front door instead of the right. The dealer hadn't laughed at him, but Ryan was sure he'd wanted to. At least he hadn't climbed into the passenger seat by mistake and really made an ass of himself. He'd have to remember all that: The "right" side of the road was the *left.* A right turn crossed oncoming traffic, not a left turn. The left lane was the slow lane on the interstates—*motorways,* he corrected himself. The plugs in the wall were all cockeyed. The house didn't have central heating, despite the princely price he'd paid for it. There was no air-conditioning, though that probably wasn't necessary here. It wasn't the hottest of climates: The locals started dropping dead in the street when the mercury topped 75. Jack wondered what the D.C. climate would do to them. Evidently, the "mad dogs and Englishmen" ditty was a thing of the past.

But it could have been worse. He did have a pass to shop for food at the Army–Air Force Exchange Service—otherwise known as the PX at nearby Greenham Commons Air Base—so at least they'd have proper hot

dogs, and brands that resembled the ones he bought at the Giant at home in Maryland.

So many other discordant notes. British television was different, of course, not that he really expected much chance to vegetate in front of the phosphor screen anymore, but little Sally needed her ration of cartoons. Besides, even when you were reading something important, the background chatter of some mindless show was comforting in its own way. The TV news wasn't too bad, though, and the newspapers were particularly good—better than those he normally read at home, on the whole, but he'd miss the morning *Far Side*. Maybe the *International Tribune* had it, Ryan hoped. He could buy it at the train station kiosk. He had to keep track of baseball anyway.

The movers—*re*movers, he reminded himself—were beavering away under Cathy's direction. It wasn't a bad house, though smaller than their place at Peregrine Cliff, now rented to a Marine colonel teaching the earnest young boys and girls at the Naval Academy. The master bedroom overlooked what seemed to be about a quarter-acre of garden. The realtor had been particularly enthused about that. And the previous owners had spent a lot of time there: It was wall-to-wall roses, mainly red and white, to honor the houses of Lancaster and York, it would seem. There were pink ones in between to show that they'd joined together to form the Tudors, though that house had died out with Elizabeth I—and ultimately made way for the new set of Royals, whom Ryan had ample reason to like.

And the weather wasn't bad at all. They'd been in country three days and it hadn't rained at all. The sun rose very early and set late, and in the winter, he'd heard, it never came up and immediately went back down again. Some of the new friends he'd made at the State Department had told him that the long nights could be hard on the little kids. At four years and six months, Sally still qualified for that. Five-month-old Jack probably didn't notice such things, and fortunately, he slept just fine—he was doing so right now, in fact, in the custody of his nanny, Margaret van der Beek, a young redhead and daughter of a Methodist minister in South Africa. She'd come highly recommended . . . and then had been cleared by a background check performed by the Metropolitan Police. Cathy was a little concerned

about the whole idea of a nanny. The idea of somebody else raising her infant grated on her like fingernails on a chalkboard, but it was an honored local custom, and it had worked out pretty well for one Winston Spencer Churchill. Miss Margaret had been vetted through Sir Basil's agency—her own agency, in fact, was officially sanctioned by Her Majesty's government. Which meant precisely nothing, Jack reminded himself. He'd been thoroughly briefed in the weeks before coming over. The "opposition"—a British term also used at Langley—had penetrated the British intelligence community more than once. CIA believed they hadn't done so at Langley yet, but Jack had to wonder about that. KGB was pretty damned good, and people were greedy all over the world. The Russians didn't pay very well, but some people sold their souls and their freedom for peanuts. They also didn't carry a flashing sign on their clothing that said I AM A TRAITOR.

Of all his briefings, the security ones had been the most tiresome. Jack's dad had been the cop in the family, and Ryan himself had never quite mastered that mode of thinking. It was one thing to look for hard data amid the cascade of crap that worked its way up the intelligence system, quite another to look with suspicion at everyone in the office and yet expect to work cordially with them. He wondered if any of the others regarded him that way . . . *probably not,* he decided. He'd paid his dues the hard way, after all, and had the pale scars on his shoulder to prove it, not to mention the nightmares of that night on Chesapeake Bay, the dreams in which his weapon never fired despite his efforts, Cathy's frantic cries of terror and alarm ringing in his ears. He'd won that battle, hadn't he? Why did the dreams think otherwise? Something to talk to a pshrink about, perhaps, but as the old wives' tale went, you had to be crazy to go to a pshrink. . . .

Sally was running about in circles, looking at her new bedroom, admiring the new bed being assembled by the removers. Jack kept out of the way. Cathy had told him he was unfitted even to supervise this sort of thing, despite his tool kit, without which no American male feels very manly, which had been among the first things unpacked. The removers had their own tools, of course—and they, too, had been vetted by SIS, lest some KGB-controlled agent plant a bug in the house. It just wouldn't do, old boy.

"Where's the tourist?" an American voice asked. Ryan went to the foyer to see who it—

"Dan! How the hell are you?"

"It was a boring day at the office, so Liz and I came out to see how things are going for you." And sure enough, just behind the Legal Attaché was his beauty-queen wife, the long-suffering St. Liz of the FBI Wives. Mrs. Murray went over to Cathy for a sisterly hug and kiss, then the two of them went immediately off to the garden. Cathy loved the roses, of course, which was fine with Jack. His dad had carried all the gardening genes in the Ryan family, and passed on none to his son. Murray gazed at his friend. "You look like hell."

"Long flight, boring book," Jack explained.

"Didn't you sleep on the way across?" Murray asked in surprise.

"On an airplane?" Ryan responded.

"It bothers you that much?"

"Dan, on a ship, you can see what's holding you up. Not in an airplane."

That gave Murray a chuckle. "Better get used to it, bud. You're gonna be building up a lot of frequent-flyer miles hopping back and forth to Dulles."

"I suppose." Strangely, Jack hadn't really considered that when he'd accepted the posting. *Dumb,* he'd realized too late. He'd be going back and forth to Langley at least once a month—not the greatest thing for a reluctant flyer.

"The moving going okay? You can trust this bunch, you know. Bas has used them for twenty-plus years, my friends at the Yard like them, too. Half of these guys are ex-cops." And cops, he didn't have to say, were more reliable than spooks.

"No bugs in the bathroom? Great," Ryan observed. During his very short experience of it so far, Ryan had learned that life in the intelligence service was a little different from teaching history at the Naval Academy. There probably *were* bugs—but wired to Basil's office . . .

"I know. Me, too. Good news, though: You'll be seeing a lot of me—if you don't mind."

Ryan nodded tiredly, trying to manage a grin. "Well, at least I'll have somebody to have a beer with."

"That's the national sport. More business gets done in pubs than at the office. Their version of the country club."

"The beer's not too bad."

"Better than the piss we have at home. I'm fully converted on that score."

"They told me at Langley that you do a lot of intel work for Emil Jacobs."

"Some." Murray nodded. "Fact of the matter is, we're better at it than a lot of you Agency types. The Operations people haven't recovered from seventy-seven yet, and I'm not sure that'll happen for a while."

Ryan had to agree. "Admiral Greer thinks so, too. Bob Ritter is pretty smart—maybe a little too smart, if you know what I mean—but he doesn't have enough friends in Congress to get his empire expanded the way that he wants."

Greer was the CIA's chief analyst, Ritter the Ops director. The two were often at odds.

"They don't trust Ritter like they do the DDI. Carryover from the Church Committee mess ten years ago. You know, the Senate never seems to remember who ran those operations. They canonize the boss and crucify the troops who tried to follow his orders—though badly. Damn, was that a—" Murray searched for the word. "The Germans call it a *schweinerei*. No translation, exactly, but, you know, it just sounds like what it is."

Jack grunted with amusement. "Yeah, better than fuckup."

The CIA's effort to assassinate Fidel Castro, which had been run out of the office of the Attorney General during the time of Camelot, had been right out of Woody Woodpecker, with a sprinkling of the Three Stooges: politicians trying to imitate James Bond, a character made up by a *failed* Brit spook. The movies just weren't the real world, as Ryan had learned the hard way, first in London, and then in his own living room.

"So, Dan, how good are they really?"

"The Brits?" Murray led Ryan out onto the front lawn. The removers *were* vetted by SIS—but Murray was FBI. "Basil is world-class. That's why he's lasted so long. He was a brilliant field spook, and he was the first guy to get a bad vibe about Philby—and remember, Basil was just a rookie then. He's good at administration, one of the most agile thinkers I've ever

come across. The local politicians on both sides of the aisle like him and trust him. That isn't easy. Kinda like Hoover was for us once, but without the cult-of-personality thing. I like him. Good dude to work with. And Bas likes you a lot, Jack."

"Why?" Ryan asked. "I haven't done much of anything."

"Bas has an eye for talent. He thinks you have the right stuff. He flat loved that thing you dreamed up last year to catch security leaks—the Canary Trap—and rescuing their next king didn't exactly hurt, y'know? You're going to be a popular boy down at Century House. If you live up to your billing, you might just have a future in the spook business."

"Great." Ryan still wasn't entirely sure that was what he wanted to do, though. "Dan, I'm a stockbroker who turned into a history teacher, remember?"

"Jack, that's behind you now. Look forward, will ya? You were pretty good picking stocks at Merrill Lynch, right?"

"I made a few bucks," Ryan admitted. Actually, it was a lot of bucks, and his portfolio was still growing. People were getting fat on The Street back home.

"So, apply your brains to something really important," Dan suggested. "I hate to tell you, Jack, but there aren't that many smart people in the intelligence community. I know. I work there. A lot of drones, a lot of moderately smart people, but damned few stars, pal. You have the stuff to be a star. Jim Greer thinks so. So does Basil. You think outside the box. I do, too. That's why I'm not chasing bank robbers in Riverside, Philadelphia, anymore. But I never made any million bucks playing the market."

"Getting lucky doesn't make you a great guy, Dan. Hell, Cathy's dad, Joe, has made a lot more 'n I ever will, and he's an opinionated, overbearing son of a bitch."

"Well, you made his daughter the wife of an honorary knight, didn't you?"

Jack smiled sheepishly. "Yeah, I suppose I did."

"That'll open a lot of doors over here, Jack. The Brits do like their titles." He paused. "Now—how about I drag you guys out for a pint? There's a nice pub up the hill, The Gypsy Moth. This moving stuff'll drive you crazy. It's almost as bad as building a house."

HIS OFFICE WAS in the first basement level of The Centre, a security measure that had never been explained to him, but it turned out there was an exact counterpart room in the headquarters of the Main Enemy. There, it was called MERCURY, messenger of the gods—very apt, if his nation acknowledged the concept of a god. The messages passed through the code and cipher clerks, came to his desk, and he examined them for content and code words, before routing them to the proper offices and officers for action; then, when the messages came back down, he routed things the other way. The traffic broke into a regular routine; mornings were usually inbound traffic and afternoons usually outbound. The tedious part was the encrypting, of course, since so many of the people out in the field used one-time pads unique to themselves—the single copies of those pads were located in the set of rooms to his right. The clerks in there transmitted and kept secrets ranging from the sex lives of Italian parliamentarians to the precise targeting hierarchy of American nuclear-strike plans.

Strangely, none of them talked about what they did or what they encrypted, inbound or outbound. The clerks were pretty mindless. Perhaps they were recruited with those psychological factors in mind—it would not have surprised him. This was an agency designed by geniuses for operation by robots. If someone could actually build such robots, he was sure they'd have them here, because you could trust machines not to diverge too greatly from their intended path.

Machines couldn't think, however, and for his own job, thinking and remembering were useful things, if the agency was to function—and function it must. It was the shield and the sword of a state which needed both. And he was the postmaster of sorts; he had to remember what went where. He didn't know everything that went on here, but he knew a lot more than most people in this building: operation names and locations, and, often enough, operational missions and taskings. He generally did not know the proper names and faces of field officers, but he knew their targets, knew the code names of their recruited agents, and, for the most part, knew what those agents were providing.

He'd been here, in this department, for nine and a half years. He'd

started in 1973, just after graduating from Moscow State University with a degree in mathematics, and his highly disciplined mind had gotten him spotted early on by a KGB talent scout. He played a particularly fine game of chess, and that, he supposed, was where his trained memory came from, all that study of the games of the old grandmasters, so that in a given situation he'd know the next move. He'd actually thought of making chess his career, but though he'd studied hard, it wasn't quite hard enough, it seemed. Boris Spassky, just a young player himself then, had annihilated him six games to none, with two desperate draws, and so ended his hopes of fame and fortune . . . and travel. He sighed at his desk. Travel. He'd studied his geography books, too, and in closing his eyes could see the images—mainly black-and-white: Venice's Grand Canal, London's Regent Street, Rio de Janeiro's magnificent Copacabana beach, the face of Mt. Everest, which Hillary had climbed when he himself had just been learning to walk . . . all those places he would never get to see. Not him. Not a person with his access and his security clearances. No, KGB was very careful with such people. It trusted no one, a lesson that had been learned the hard way. What was it about his country that so many tried to escape from it? And yet so many millions had died fighting for the *rodina*. . . . He'd been spared military service because of his mathematics and his chess potential, and then, he supposed, because of his recruitment to #2 Dzerzhinskiy Square. Along with it came a nice flat, fully seventy-five square meters, in a recently finished building. Military rank, too—he'd become a senior captain within weeks of his majority, which, on the whole, wasn't too bad. Even better, he'd just started getting paid now in certificate rubles, and so was able to shop in the "closed" stores for Western consumer goods—and, best of all, with shorter lines. His wife appreciated that. He'd soon be in the entry level of the *nomenklatura*, like a minor czarist prince, looking up the ladder and wondering how far he might climb. But unlike the czars, he was here not by blood but by merit—a fact that appealed to his manhood, Captain Zaitzev thought.

Yes, he'd earned his way here, and that was important. That's why he was trusted with secrets, this one for example: an agent code-named CASSIUS, an American living in Washington; it seemed he had access to valuable political intelligence that was treasured by people on the fifth

floor, and which was often seconded to experts in the U.S.–Canada Institute, which studied the tea leaves in America. Canada wasn't very important to the KGB, except for its participation in the American air-defense systems, and because some of its senior politicians didn't like their powerful southern neighbor, or so the *rezident* in Ottawa regularly told his superiors upstairs. Zaitzev wondered about that. The Poles might not love their eastern neighbor either, but the Poles mostly did what they were told—the Warsaw *rezident* had reported with unconcealed pleasure in his dispatch the previous month—as that union hothead had found out to his discomfort. "Counterrevolutionary scum" had been the term used by Colonel Igor Alekseyevich Tomachevskiy. The Colonel was thought to be a rising star, due for a posting to the West. That's where the really good ones went.

TWO AND A half miles across town, Ed Foley was first in the door, with his wife, Mary Patricia, just behind him, leading Eddie by the hand. Eddie's young blue eyes were wide with a child's curiosity, but even now the four-and-a-half-year-old was learning that Moscow wasn't Disney World. The culture shock was about to fall like Thor's own hammer, but it would expand his horizons a bit, his parents thought. As it would theirs.

"Uh-huh," Ed Foley said on his first look. An embassy consular officer had lived here before, and he'd at least made an effort to clean the place up, no doubt helped by a Russian domestic—the Soviet government provided them, and diligent they were . . . for both their bosses. Ed and Mary Pat had been thoroughly briefed for weeks—nay, months—before taking the long Pan Am flight out of JFK for Moscow.

"So, this is home, eh?" Ed observed in a studiously neutral voice.

"Welcome to Moscow," Mike Barnes told the newbies. He was another consular officer, a career FSO on the way up, and had this week's duty as the embassy greeter. "The last occupant was Charlie Wooster. Good guy, back at Foggy Bottom now, catching the summer heat."

"How are the summers here?" Mary Pat asked.

"Kinda like Minneapolis," Barnes answered. "Not real hot, and the humidity's not too bad, and the winters are actually not as severe—I grew up

in Minneapolis," he explained. "Of course, the German army might not agree, or Napoleon, but, well, nobody ever said Moscow was supposed to be like Paris, right?"

"Yeah, they told me about the nightlife," Ed chuckled. It was all right with him. They didn't need a stealthy Station Chief in Paris, and this was the biggest, ripest plum assignment he'd never expected to get. Bulgaria, maybe, but not the very belly of the beast. Bob Ritter must have been really impressed by his time in Tehran. Thank God Mary Pat had delivered Eddie when she had. They'd missed the takeover in Iran by, what, three weeks? It had been a troublesome pregnancy, and Mary Pat's doc had insisted on their coming back to New York for the delivery. Kids were a gift from God, all right. . . . Besides, that had made Eddie a New Yorker, too, and Ed had damned well wanted his son to be a Yankees and Rangers fan from birth. The best news of this assignment, aside from the professional stuff, was that he'd see the best ice hockey in the world right here in Moscow. Screw the ballet and the symphony. These fuckers knew how to skate. Pity the Russkies didn't understand baseball. Probably too sophisticated for the muzhiks. All those pitches to choose from . . .

"It's not real big," Mary Pat observed, looking at one cracked window. They were on the sixth floor. At least the traffic noise wouldn't be too bad. The foreigners' compound—ghetto—was walled and guarded. This was for their protection, the Russians insisted, but street crime against foreigners wasn't a problem in Moscow. The average Russian citizen was forbidden by law to have foreign currency in his possession, and there was no convenient way to spend it in any case. So there was little profit in mugging an American or Frenchman on the streets, and there was no mistaking them—their clothing marked them about as clearly as peacocks among crows.

"Hello!" It was an English accent. The florid face appeared a moment later. "We're your neighbors. Nigel and Penny Haydock," the face's owner said. He was about forty-five, tall and skinny, with prematurely gray and thinning hair. His wife, younger and prettier than he probably deserved, appeared an instant later with a tray of sandwiches and some welcoming white wine.

"You must be Eddie," the flaxen-haired Mrs. Haydock observed. That's

when Ed Foley noticed the maternity dress. She was about six months gone, by the look of her. So the briefings had been right in every detail. Foley trusted CIA, but he'd learned the hard way to verify everything, from the names of people living on the same floor to whether the toilet flushed reliably. *Especially in Moscow,* he thought, heading for the bathroom. Nigel followed.

"The plumbing works reliably here, but it is noisy. No one complains," Haydock explained.

Ed Foley flipped the handle and, sure enough, it was noisy.

"Fixed that myself. Bit of a handyman, you see," he said. Then, more quietly, "Be careful where you speak in this place, Ed. Bloody bugs everywhere. Especially the bedrooms. The bloody Russians like to count our orgasms, so it seems. Penny and I try not to disappoint." A sly grin. Well, to some cities you brought your own nightlife.

"Two years here?" The toilet seemed to run forever. Foley was tempted to lift the tank cover to see if Haydock had replaced the plumbing hardware inside with something special. He decided he didn't have to look to check that.

"Twenty-nine months. Seven to go. It's a lively place to work. I'm sure they told you, everywhere you go, you'll have a 'friend' handy. Don't underestimate them, either. The Second Directorate chaps are thoroughly trained. . . ." The toilet ran its course, and Haydock changed his voice. "The shower—the hot water is pretty reliable, but the spray pipe, it rattles, just like the one in our flat. . . ." He turned the faucet to demonstrate. Sure enough, it rattled. *Had someone worked on the wall to loosen it?* Ed wondered. Probably. Probably this very handyman with him.

"Perfect."

"Yes, you will get a lot of work done in here. Shower with a friend and save water—isn't that what they say in California?"

Foley managed his first laugh in Moscow. "Yeah, that's what they say, all right." He gave his visitor a look. He was surprised that Haydock had introduced himself so early, but maybe it was just reverse-English tradecraft to be so obvious. The business of espionage had all manner of rules, and the Russians were rule-followers. So, Bob Ritter had told him, toss away *part* of the rulebook. Stick to your cover and be a dumbass unpre-

dictable American every chance you get. He'd also told the Foleys that Nigel Haydock was one guy they could trust. He was the son of another intelligence officer—a man betrayed by Kim Philby himself, one of the poor bastards who'd parachuted into Albania into the waiting arms of the KGB reception committee. Nigel had been five years old then, just old enough always to remember what it was like to lose your father to the enemy. Nigel's motivation was probably as good as Mary Pat's, and that was pretty damned good. Better even than his own, Ed Foley might admit after a few drinks. Mary Pat hated the bastards as the Lord God Himself hated sin. Haydock wasn't the Station Chief here, but he was the head bird-dog for the SIS's operation in Moscow, and that made him pretty good. The CIA's Director, Judge Moore, trusted the Brits: after Philby, he'd seen them go through SIS with a flamethrower hotter than even James Jesus Angleton's fly rod and cauterize every possible leak. In turn, Foley trusted Judge Moore, and so did the President. That was the craziest part of the intelligence business: You couldn't trust *anybody*—but you had to trust *somebody*.

Well, Foley thought, checking the hot water with his hand, *nobody ever said the business made much sense.* Like classical metaphysics. It just was.

"When's the furniture get here?"

"The container ought to be on a truck in Leningrad right now. Will they tamper with it?"

Haydock shrugged. "Check everything," he warned, then softened. "You can never know how thorough they are, Edward. The KGB is a great bloody bureaucracy—you don't know the meaning of the word until you see it in operation here. For example, the bugs in your flat—how many of them actually work? They're not British Telecom, nor are they AT&T. It's the curse of this country, really, and it works for us, but that, too, is unreliable. When you're followed, you can't know if it's an experienced expert or some bloody nimrod who can't find his way to the loo. They look alike and dress alike. Just like our people, when you get down to it, but their bureaucracy is so large that there's a greater likelihood it will protect the incompetent—or maybe not. God knows, at Century House we have our share of drones."

Foley nodded. "At Langley, we call it the Intelligence Directorate."

"Quite. We call ours the Palace of Westminster," Haydock observed, with his own favorite prejudice. "I think we've tested the plumbing enough."

Foley turned off the faucet and the two men returned to the living room, where Penny and Mary Pat were getting acquainted.

"Well, we have enough hot water anyway, honey."

"Glad to hear it," Mary Pat responded. She turned back to her guest. "Where do you shop around here?"

Penny Haydock smiled: "I can take you there. For special items, we can order from an agency in Helsinki, excellent quality: English, French, German—even American, for things like juices and preserved foods. The perishables are Finnish in origin, and they're generally very good, especially the lamb. Don't they have the finest lamb, Nigel?"

"Indeed it is—as good as New Zealand," her husband agreed.

"The steaks leave something to be desired," Mike Barnes told them, "but every week we get steaks flown in from Omaha. Tons of them—we distribute them to all our friends."

"That is the truth," Nigel confirmed. "Your corn-fed beef is superb. I'm afraid we're all quite addicted to it."

"Thank God for the U.S. Air Force," Barnes went on. "They fly the beef into all their NATO bases, and we're on the distribution list. They come in frozen, not quite as good as fresh at Delmonico's, but close enough to remind you of home. I hope you guys brought a grill. We tend to take them up on the roof to cook out. We import charcoal, too. Ivan just doesn't seem to understand about that." The apartment had no balcony, perhaps to protect them from the diesel smell that pervaded the city.

"What about going to work?" Foley asked.

"Better to take the metro. It really is great," Barnes told him.

"Leaving me with the car?" Mary Pat asked, with a hopeful smile. This was going exactly to plan. That was expected, but anything that went well in this business came as something of a surprise, like the right presents under the Christmas tree. You always hoped Santa got the letter, but you could never be sure.

"You might as well learn how to drive in this city," Barnes said. "At least you have a nice car." The previous resident in this apartment had left be-

hind a white Mercedes 280 for them, which was indeed a nice car. Actually, a little too nice at only four years old. Not that there were all that many cars in Moscow, and the license plates surely marked it as belonging to an American diplomat, and thus easy to spot by any traffic cop, and by the KGB vehicle that would follow it most places it went. Again, it was reverse-English. Mary Pat would have to learn to drive like an Indianapolis resident on her first trip to New York. "The streets are nice and wide," Barnes told her, "and the gas station is only three blocks that way." He pointed. "It's a huge one. The Russians like to build them that way."

"Great," she observed for Barnes's benefit, already dropping into her cover as a pretty, ditsy blonde. Around the world, the pretty ones were supposed to be the dumb ones, and blondes most of all. It was a hell of a lot easier to play dumb than to be smart, after all, Hollywood actors notwithstanding.

"What about servicing the car?" Ed asked.

"It's a Mercedes. They don't break much," Barnes assured them. "The German embassy has a guy who can fix anything that goes bad. We're cordial with our NATO allies. You guys soccer fans?"

"Girls' game," Ed Foley responded immediately.

"That's rather coarse of you," Nigel Haydock observed.

"Give me American football any time," Foley countered.

"Bloody foolish, uncivilized game, full of violence and committee meetings," the Brit sniffed.

Foley grinned. "Let's eat."

They sat down. The interim furniture was adequate, something like you'd find in a no-tell motel in Alabama. You could sleep on the bed, and the bug spray had probably done for all the crawly things. Probably.

The sandwiches were okay. Mary Pat went to get glasses and turned on the taps—

"Recommend against that one, Mrs. Foley," Nigel warned. "Some people come down with stomach complaints from the tap water. . . ."

"Oh?" She paused. "And my name's Mary Pat, Nigel."

Now they were properly introduced. "Yes, Mary Pat. We prefer bottled water for drinking. The tap water is good enough for bathing, and you can boil it in a pinch for coffee and tea."

"It's even worse in Leningrad," Nigel warned. "The natives are more or less immunized, they tell me, but we foreigners can get some serious GI problems there."

"What about schools?" Mary Pat had been worried about that.

"The American-British school looks after the children well," Penny Haydock promised. "I work there myself part-time. And the academic program there is top-drawer."

"Eddie's starting to read already, isn't he, honey?" the proud father announced.

"Just *Peter Rabbit* and that sort of thing, but not bad for four," an equally pleased mother confirmed for the rest. For his part, Eddie had found the sandwich plate and was gnawing through something. It wasn't his treasured bologna, but a hungry kid is not always discriminating. There were also four large jars of Skippy's Super Chunk peanut butter packed away in a safe place. His parents figured they could get grape jelly anywhere, but probably not Skippy. The local bread, everyone said, was decent, if not exactly the Wonder Bread that American children had been raised on. And Mary Pat had a bread-maker in their cargo container, now on a truck or train between Moscow and Leningrad. A good cook, she was a positive artist at baking bread, and expected that to be her entrée into the embassy social set.

NOT ALL THAT far away from where they sat, a letter changed hands. The deliverer was from Warsaw, and had been dispatched by his government—actually, by an agency of his government to an agency of the recipient government. The messenger was not all that pleased by his mission. He was a communist—he had to be in order to be entrusted with such a task—but he was nonetheless a Pole, as was the subject of the message and the mission. And that was the rub.

The message was in fact a photocopy of the original, which had arrived by hand to an office—an important one—in Warsaw only three days before.

The messenger, a full colonel in his country's intelligence service, was personally known to the recipient, by sight if not especially by affection.

The Russians used their western neighbors for many tasks. The Poles had a real talent for intelligence operations, for the same reason the Israelis did: They were surrounded by enemies. To their west was Germany, and to their east was the Soviet Union. The unhappy circumstances involved in both had resulted in Poland's putting many of its best and brightest into the intelligence business.

The recipient knew all that. In fact, he already knew word for word the content of the message. He'd learned it the previous day. He was not surprised at the delay, though. The Polish government had taken that day to consider the contents and its import before forwarding it, and the recipient took no umbrage. Every government in the world took at least one day to go over such things. It was just the nature of men in positions of authority to diddle and waver, even though they had to know that delay was a waste of time and air. Even Marxism-Leninism couldn't alter human nature. Sad, but true. The New Soviet Man, like the New Polish Man, was, in the end, still a man.

The ballet being played out now was as stylized as any performed by the Kirov troupe in Leningrad. The recipient even imagined he could hear the music playing. He actually preferred Western jazz to classical, but in any case the music at the ballet was just the garnish, the system that told the dancers when to leap together like pretty, trained dogs. The ballerinas were far too slender for Russian tastes, of course, but real women were far too heavy for those little fairies they called men to toss about.

Why was his mind wandering? He resumed his seat, falling back slowly into his leather chair as he unfolded the letter. It was written in Polish, and he didn't speak or read Polish, but affixed to it was a translation in literate Russian. Of course, he'd have his own translators go over it, plus two or three psychiatrists to consider the mental state of the drafter and to compose their own multipage analysis, which he'd have to read, time waster though that would be. Then he'd have to report on it, to provide his political superiors—no, his political *peers*—with all of these additional insights so that they could waste *their* time going over the message and its import before considering what to do about it.

The Chairman wondered if this Polish colonel realized how easy his own political bosses had had it. In the end, all they'd had to do was for-

ward it to their own political masters for action, bucking the decision up the tree of responsibility as government functionaries all do, regardless of place or philosophy. Vassals were vassals the world over.

The Chairman looked up at him. "Comrade Colonel, thank you for bringing this to my attention. Please extend my greetings and my respects to your commander. Dismissed."

The Pole snapped to attention, saluted in the curious Polish way, did his best parade-ground about face, then headed off to the door.

Yuriy Andropov watched the door close before turning his attention back to the message and its appended translation.

"So, Karol, you threaten us, eh?" He clucked his tongue and shook his head before going on as quietly as before. "You are brave, but your judgment needs adjustment, my cleric comrade."

He looked up again, pondering. The office had the usual artwork covering the walls, and for the same reason as in any other office—to avoid blankness. Two were oil paintings by Renaissance masters, borrowed from the collection of some long-dead czar or nobleman. A third portrait, rather a good one, actually, was of Lenin, the pale complexion and domed forehead known to millions all around the world. A nicely framed color photograph of Leonid Brezhnev, the current General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, hung near it. The photo was a lie, a picture of a young and vigorous man, not the senile old goat who now sat at the head of the Politburo table. Well, all men grew old, but in most places, such men left their jobs for honorable retirement. But not in his country, Andropov realized . . . and looked down at the letter. And not this man, either. This job, too, was for life.

But he is threatening to change that part of the equation, the Chairman of the Committee for State Security thought. And in that was the danger.

Danger?

The consequences were unknown, and that was danger enough. His Politburo colleagues would see it the same way, old, cautious, and frightened men that they were.

And so he had not merely to report the danger. He must also present a means of dealing with it effectively.

The portraits that ought to have been on his wall right now were of two

men who were semiforgotten. One would have been Iron Feliks—Dzerzhinskiy himself, the founder of the Cheka, the antecedent of the KGB.

The other ought to have been Josef Vissarionovich Stalin. The leader had once posed a question that was relevant to the very situation that faced Andropov now. Then, it had been 1944. Now—now maybe it was even more relevant.

Well, that remained to be seen. And he'd be the man to make that determination, Andropov told himself. All men could be made to disappear. The thought should have surprised him when it leapt into his head, but it didn't. This building, built eighty years earlier to be the palatial home office of the Rossiya Insurance Company, had seen a lot of that, and its inhabitants had issued orders to cause many, many more deaths. They used to have executions in the basement. That had ended only a few years before, as KGB expanded to include all the space in even this massive structure—and another on the inner ring road around the city—but the cleanup crew occasionally whispered about the ghosts to be seen on quiet nights, sometimes startling the old washerwomen with their buckets and brushes and witch-like hair. The government of this country didn't believe in such things as spirits and ghosts any more than it believed in a man's immortal soul, but doing away with the superstitions of the simple peasants was a more difficult task than getting the intelligentsia to buy into the voluminous writings of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Karl Marx, or Friedrich Engels, not to mention the turgid prose attributed to Stalin (but actually done by a committee formed of frightened men, and all the worse because of it), which was, blessedly, no longer much in demand except to the most masochistic of scholars.

No, Yuriy Vladimirovich told himself, *getting people to believe in Marxism wasn't all that hard.* First, they hammered it into their heads in grammar schools, and the Young Pioneers, and high schools, and the Komsomolets, the Young Communist League, and then the really smart ones became full Party members, keeping their Party cards "next to their hearts," in the cigarette pockets of their shirts.

But by then, they knew better. The politically aware members professed their belief at Party meetings because they had to do that to get ahead. In the same way, the smart courtiers in pharaonic Egypt kneeled and shielded

their eyes from the bright-light-emanating face, lest they be blinded—they held up their hands because, in Pharaoh, in the person of their Living God, was personal power and prosperity, and so they knelt their obeisance and denied their senses and their sensibility and got ahead. So it was here. Five thousand years, was it? He could check a history book. The Soviet Union turned out some of the world's foremost medieval historians, and doubtless some competent antiquarians as well, because that was one area of scholarship where politics didn't matter much. The facts of ancient Egypt were too distant from contemporary reality to matter to the philosophical speculation of Marx or the endless ramblings of Lenin. And so some fine scholars went into that field. More went into the pure sciences, because pure science was pure science and a hydrogen atom had no politics.

But agriculture did. Manufacturing did. And so the best and brightest stayed away from those areas, opting instead for political studies. Because there success was to be found. You didn't have to believe it any more than you believed that Ramses II was the living son of the sun god, or whatever the hell god he was supposed to have issued from. Instead, Yuriy Vladimirovich figured, the courtiers saw that Ramses had numerous wives and even more numerous progeny, and that, on the whole, wasn't a bad life for a man to have. The classical equivalent of a dacha in the Lenin Hills and summers on the beach at Sochi. So, did the world ever really change?

Probably not, the Chairman of the Committee for State Security decided. And his job was largely to protect against change.

And this letter threatened change, didn't it? It was a threat, and he might have to do something about the threat. That meant doing something about the man behind it.

It had happened before. It could happen again, he decided.

Andropov would not live long enough to learn that in considering this action, he would set in motion the demise of his own country.