



PRESTON
EXILE HUNTER
FLEMING

EXILE HUNTER

A NOVEL

BY PRESTON FLEMING

This eBook is a work of fiction. Names characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2014 by Preston Fleming

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form of by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

<http://www.prestonfleming.com>

ISBN-10: 0-982-959486

ISBN-13: 978-0-9829594-8-0

S1

Who can protest and does not, is an accomplice in the act.

The Talmud

SEPTEMBER, THURSDAY, WEST BEIRUT

Warren Linder stepped from the taxi onto the cobbled side street, felt the glaring heat of the midday sun, and nearly fell on the ice. Not sheet ice, for this was September in Beirut, but a layer of discarded ice cubes that some restaurant sous-chef had poured onto the curb. Seizing the taxi door with both hands, Linder regained his balance quickly, but for all his hardheaded worldliness, he had developed a superstitious streak of late and, rather than curse at the proximate cause of his near fall, pondered whether it might have a deeper meaning. And in that moment he wished he had never left his flat in the Cypriot resort town of Limassol, a mere hour's flight away, where he had spent the previous night after a week on the road.

While he imagined himself back on his fourth floor balcony overlooking Akrotiri Bay, the taxi driver fetched his bags from the trunk, deposited them on the sidewalk, and awaited payment. Linder refocused in time to pull a wad of Lebanese banknotes from his jacket breast pocket and pay

the jovial driver, adding a generous tip and a few words of appreciation.

Only then did he notice his reflection in the polished car window. The sight unnerved him: he looked every bit as dissipated as he felt. The dark circles under his bloodshot, puffy eyes, the gray streaks infiltrating his hair and whisker stubble, the furrows in his forehead and cheeks: these were all products of the past two years.

Though he exercised most days, ate reasonably well when he could, and made an effort to catch enough sleep and cut back on the booze, Linder knew his 38-year-old body had logged more than its share of mileage and stress during his dozen years of government service. He was nearing the end of his rope: the proof of it was in the mirror, and in the nightmares, and in the need for more and more alcohol to stave off his dread.

All at once he felt a powerful urge to pitch it all and board the next ferry to Larnaca and, from there, another boat to Turkey and then a bus or taxi to some obscure seaside or mountain village in Greece or the Balkans where he could buy time and figure out how to give his life a radical makeover.

He turned and called out to the driver.

"Is there still a daily ferry from Beirut to Cyprus these days?"

"Not daily, not weekly, *siidi*. To go by sea, you must hire a boat and a captain. Best to find them at Jounieh or Kaslik. Shall I take you?"

Linder hesitated.

"And to Syria? The same?"

"There are ships for carrying goods to Latakia, but none for the people."

"Too bad. Maybe another time, then," Linder replied, noticing the middle-aged doorman who had come to fetch his luggage. With a parting nod to the driver, Warren Linder followed the doorman and his bags into the lobby of the Hotel Cavalier.

The desk clerk was an unctuous twenty-something Lebanese with a receding hairline and ample paunch, likely the product of some European hotel-management school or apprenticeship, one of the generation of prematurely aged young fogeys who were rebuilding the new commercial city-state of Beirut from the ashes of its most recent conflagration. Linder greeted the clerk in French and handed him the alias passport that he occasionally used for the kind of undercover work that had brought him to Beirut. The clerk gave him a professional once-over, then proceeded to check him in.

As Linder pulled out his wallet, full of credit cards and IDs under his current alias, the urge to flee gripped him once more, and he wondered whether he had enough cash and credit in his two hands, right now, today, to vanish from sight. No, came the answer; it was impossible. Even if he took cash advances from all the credit cards before leaving Beirut, he would not get very far. Without having planned further ahead, he would likely be caught within days.

This sudden feeling of dread and unease puzzled him. Usually, he loved being on the road and arriving in a new city. Though he sometimes dreamed fondly of having a real home, of putting down roots somewhere with a wife and family, each time he returned to his flat in Limassol, or Basel, or London before that, or even Cleveland to visit his parents and sister, within days of arriving he would daydream of being on the road again.

The problem with being a self-starter and overachiever was that he could never quite bring himself to slow down. He felt rather like a shark that needed to constantly move to survive. The analogy was apt, not only because of the work he did, but also because it was true in a physical sense. His muscular, heavy-boned physique was so lean that he could literally lie flat on the bottom of a swimming pool without

rising. From adolescence on, he had come to hate swimming because if he failed to swim fast, he sank.

After completing the check-in procedure, Linder took the self-service elevator to the hotel's top floor and found his mini-suite at the end of the hall. It was as spacious and well appointed as the operations assistant at Beirut Base had described by email, with a view of the shimmering Mediterranean across a vast array of red-tiled roofs. Linder placed his suitcase on the folding luggage rack, opened it to retrieve his toiletries kit, and retired to the bathroom to freshen up after his travels. When he returned to the sitting room, he opened a tall bottle of sparkling mineral water, poured himself a glass, and downed it in a single draft. Next, he pulled out a tourist map of Beirut and had barely spread it across the coffee table when he heard a sharp rap at the door.

Quickly Linder refolded the map and closed his suitcase before walking quietly to the door. Through the peephole, he saw a familiar face, and, without hesitation, opened the door to let in Neil Denniston. Both men waited for the door to close before speaking.

Denniston, a gangling, narrow-shouldered figure dressed in dark tropical wool dress trousers and a tailored striped shirt unbuttoned to the breast bone, wore a confident grin as

he offered his hand to Linder. His lush crop of flaxen hair had thinned on top since Linder had last seen him three summers before, and his deep-set eyes and thin-lipped mouth were surrounded by a few new wrinkles, but otherwise, Denniston looked much the same as he did a decade ago when the two men had worked together on a CIA-led counterterrorist team, also in Beirut.

Five years later, both left the Agency to join the newly formed Department of State Security at a time when nearly all American troops and intelligence operatives were being brought home for good. As with Vietnam-era counterinsurgency experts two generations earlier, Arabic-speaking counterterrorist officers now glutted the market as they filed through the crowded halls of the Pentagon and CIA Headquarters, searching in vain for onward assignments.

Then, as now, Denniston was always on the alert for career-advancing opportunities, always the first to pursue the next big thing, always hustling close friends and associates to team up with him on his next gig. And Denniston was nothing if not persuasive. He had a deceptively languid manner, speaking slowly and softly in a Kentucky Gentleman drawl that charmed many into underestimating his shrewdness and force of will. Similarly, by maintaining eye contact and lavishing praise, he made others feel as if there was no one

else in the world he would rather talk to. Women, particularly the more vacuous ones, tended to find Denniston irresistible. In an earlier era, Linder could easily picture his friend as a Mississippi riverboat gambler or a Florida land swindler or a New Orleans pimp.

Denniston's personal qualities, Linder was certain, perfectly matched CIA's recruiting profile for new clandestine operations officers, a profile that dated back to the World War II Office of Strategic Services and was refined continuously by way of sophisticated psychological testing techniques. The same recruiting profile, Linder believed, described the constellation of character traits commonly found among loan sharks, Wall Street bond salesmen, drug pushers, Ponzi schemers, plaintiff lawyers, used car salesmen, and other borderline sociopaths.

Such charm, craftiness, and determination were largely the reason why Denniston was now Branch Chief for North Africa and the Near East in the DSS's Émigré Division. Of course, his Unionist Party membership had also played a role, but joining the Party before the President-for-Life's final election was just one more example of his friend's unusual foresight and tactical genius. When he and Denniston were fraternity brothers at Kenyon and Linder coached him through one exam after another, Linder would

never have imagined that one day Denniston's career would outshine his.

Linder took Denniston's outstretched hand and gave it a hearty shake before pouring his guest a tumbler of sparkling water.

"Sorry, I don't have anything stronger," Linder said as he handed over the glass. "No ice, either."

"You can send up for something if you want. They have an excellent bar here," Denniston offered.

"Yes, I remember."

"Of course," Denniston responded. "You were stationed here, too, in those days. I keep forgetting. It seems like another lifetime."

Linder poured himself another glass of water and took a seat across the coffee table from Denniston. This time he would not let Denniston suck him into another drinking bout. If Denniston wanted to booze it up, he could visit the bar alone.

"At the risk of being abrupt, Neil, I'd like to ask you a question I didn't want to put in official email traffic. What exactly do you and Bednarski want from me in this operation? My understanding is that your target is one of the rebel leaders who looted the downtown banks during the Battle of Cleveland, and that your objective is to render him back

to the States. But don't you already have an inside man to set this up? Why do you need me?"

"Actually, the only inside man right now is you," Denniston replied with his usual self-assurance. "Our plan is to introduce you as an insurgent leader from one of the western restricted zones. Your funding request will be of a scale that requires our target's approval, since he decides on all major funding requests to his particular war chest."

"So you want me to go to him as Mormon Joe Tanner?" Linder asked. "Has your man met Tanner before?"

"Not yet, but we've had a couple of our European-based assets vouch for you. And there's one other step involved. You see, before you can get to our primary target, you'll have to make your pitch to his go-between."

Linder shook his head in distaste. "Does Headquarters know about this? Frankly, Neil, this is starting to sound like something you cooked up on your way over here."

"Oh, they know all right—in broad terms, of course," Denniston responded, full of his usual bravado. "The thing is, the old man is cagey and easily spooked. That's why we wanted somebody with demonstrated abilities in dealing with insurgent types, so we can reach our man on the first try. In short, we wanted the best undercover operator around, and that's you."

Linder had heard the pitch before: Denniston was in over his head and needed someone to bail him out.

"If you're resorting to flattery, there must be a catch. What is it? Whose signoff are you missing?"

Denniston shifted uneasily in his seat and looked away before answering.

"No, really, we're good to go. Bednarski has an oral okay from the Division Chief."

"Oral? I'd prefer something in writing," Linder pressed. "I know we're under time pressure and all that, but..."

"Sure, just ask Bob," Denniston nodded. "Since he's Base Chief, officially it's his op. You can talk to him when we get together this evening."

"Yeah, right. A lot of good that's likely to do me, considering how well he and I get along." Linder complained. Linder realized his complaint was useless. There was no way out; he was here, and so he would have to perform. Denniston had outmaneuvered him again. "So, tell me, how many days are we going to need for this? And how far do you expect it to go? Are we reeling in the fish in one go or just setting the hook?"

"That depends on whether you can get a face-to-face meeting with the target," Denniston explained, leaning back

in his chair, getting comfortable. "Once you do, and you establish your bona fides, we'll decide how far and how fast to push. You may have to come back once or twice to seal the deal."

Linder offered his colleague a resigned smile.

"No problem there," he answered. "I've been working this town for over ten years and have become rather attached to it. Now, do you mind telling me who the target is?"

Denniston paused for effect.

"Roger Kendall is the go-between," he teased.

"Then the target is..." Linder felt a sudden tightening in his gut.

"You guessed it. Philip Eaton."

Linder gritted his teeth. "You're certain of that?"

"No doubt about it," Denniston shot back.

"I heard that Eaton might have travelled this way, but what is Kendall doing here?" Linder challenged. "He never leaves London any more."

"Don't forget, Eaton is his new father-in-law," Denniston pointed out. "And Kendall seems to think that the meeting with Tanner is very important. So it appears his visit is mixing business with pleasure."

Linder rose from his chair and strode to the open window. He gazed out over the Mediterranean and spotted a

fishing boat heading out to sea. He wondered how long the trip to Limassol might take, if he chartered a yacht from Jounieh. And how much would it cost? He just might be able to put together enough cash for that with advances from the alias credit cards. There was plenty more in his safe deposit box in Limassol. He just had to get in and out before anyone knew he was missing.

Linder's mind raced on. He imagined himself disappearing on foot into the back alleys of the Lebanese capital, catching a taxi and making his way through the hills to the east, across the Bekaa Valley into Syria, then up the coast to Turkey and across Bulgaria to some seaside resort in Croatia or Montenegro or Albania. The urge had been nagging at him for the better part of a year, but now it was more powerful than ever: if he did not break free and start a new life now, leaving everything he knew behind, something dreadful was certain to happen. But if he fled and was caught, his end would likely be just as dreadful: arrest and conviction on national security charges, a sentence to hard labor in some godforsaken prison camp in Alaska or the Yukon, and death from overwork or exposure.

Linder managed to regain control of his wayward thoughts, turned away from the window, and met Denniston's gaze.

"Did Kendall bring his family?"

"You mean Eaton's daughter and granddaughter?"

Denniston inquired.

Linder nodded.

"Not to our knowledge," Denniston answered. "Kendall's registered at the Sofitel in Achrafiyé. He seems to be alone."

Linder scowled as he strode back to the couch.

"I don't get it. Kendall is a mere dabbler in rebel politics. And the latest word on Eaton is that he's run out of dough. Frankly, Neil, this whole thing is looking like a fool's errand."

"Bob and I disagree," Denniston demurred. "And so does the Division Chief. So here's what we're going to do. You're set to meet Kendall tomorrow for coffee at one o'clock on the East Side. Right now, I suggest you get some rest, shower up, and meet me downstairs at seven. We'll go to Bob's for drinks and then step out for dinner and work everything out among the three of us."

"Out to dinner? Together? When we're prepping for an op? Have you gone nuts?"

Denniston shrugged and flashed his most disarming smile.

"Don't fret. Eaton and Kendall never come to the Muslim side of town after dark. Besides, Bob wants to go out; and when Bob gets his mind set on something, there's no point arguing with him."

Without waiting for a response, Denniston finished his mineral water and rose to leave.

"Come to think of it, let's not meet downstairs at seven. Why don't I pick you up on Rue Clemenceau instead? I'll look for you at seven sharp walking along the fence side of the street by the American University. I'll be driving a silver Renault station wagon. It'll be fun. You'll see."

* * *

The telephone rang and jolted Linder awake from a fitful sleep. It was the front desk with his six o'clock wakeup call. He thanked the clerk quickly and hung up.

The call had come as much-needed reprieve, for his afternoon nap had unleashed one of his worst recurring nightmares, the one of the dark pit, with foul-smelling hyenas snapping at his buttocks amid the bitter reproaches

of souls he had marked for assassination or capture during his decade-long work against terrorists and insurgents. As usual, Linder had called upon Jesus and his guardian angel to rescue him, and they came to lift him out to the leeward slopes of some frozen mountain range. But would they come the next time if he didn't turn his life around? He was still shivering when the phone's ring brought him to his senses.

Until today, the pit had never pulled him in during a nap, but only late at night when he could no longer stave off sleep or unconsciousness from drink. This worried him, for it meant that his naps could no longer be relied upon to restore his energy or peace of mind.

Linder sat upright, picked up the phone a second time, and asked the clerk to connect him to the bar. In his best French, he asked the bartender to send up a bottle of local brandy.

"Please forgive me," the barkeep answered in English. "But our Lebanese brandy is not the very best. May I suggest a French cognac or an Armenian five star?"

"Send up the Armenian, then," Linder interrupted. "An ordinary grade will do. I'm on a budget." He forced a laugh and the bartender joined him.

Though Linder had done little but sit all day, he felt utterly exhausted. He could no longer deny it: his life had spun out of control. And while it left him frustrated and angry, he could blame no one but himself.

At the age of thirty-eight, he was still ranked as a journeyman case officer. Not a Chief of Base, or a branch chief, or even a desk chief or a deputy. No, merely a highly efficient cog in the global search-and-destroy machine. The good news was that Headquarters continued to value his services and allowed him to enjoy the perks of an overseas posting rather than suffer a pauper's life back in the nation's capital.

But at the same time, Linder was painfully aware that he had lately become a caricature of himself: often drunk, occasionally impotent, increasingly alone, bored, and belligerent. Chronic nightmares featuring the people he had targeted now plagued him several times a week. To avoid the side effects of sleeping pills, he had become dependent on alcohol to repel the troublesome visions. His usual drink of choice was a stiff whiskey cocktail like an Old-Fashioned or a Manhattan, but when traveling, he often resorted to a full-bodied brandy or aged rum that went down smoothly without ice or a mixer. At first, his hangovers had been moderate and could usually be dispelled with a morning run and a hot

shower, but not any longer. Even worse, whenever he cut the dosage, his nightmares returned at full roar.

The root of the problem, he realized, was that he had ridden the tiger too long. Each time he considered resigning from the Department, he rejected the idea out of fear that he was no longer qualified to do anything else. He held an M.B.A. from Columbia and had worked briefly in pharmaceutical sales, but he had devoted the last dozen years to honing his skills as a professional predator. Having done it so well for so long, he could not bring himself to let go without a push.

At last, the scream of a police siren tore Linder's attention free from his gloomy thoughts. He stood up, fetched a bathrobe from the closet, and set off for the shower. But before he could cross the room, a knock on the door stopped him in his tracks. He steeled himself to look in the keyhole and, to his relief, saw the bellman bearing a bottle of brandy, an ice bucket, and two glasses on a tray.

Linder removed a banknote from his wallet and traded it for the brandy.

"Charge it to my room. This is for you," he told the bellman and waited for him to retreat before admiring the deep amber color of the aged spirit and examining the intricate Armenian writing on the label. He shook his head, put the bottle down, and withdrew to the shower.

* * *

On his way through the Hotel Cavalier's marble-tiled lobby, Linder paused to peer into the lifeless tourist bar before exiting onto Rue Abdel-Baki toward the American University of Beirut.

More than thirty-five years since the outbreak of Lebanon's civil war, few signs of fighting remained: no mortar potholes in the blacktopped streets, no chunks of stucco blasted away from the walls of high-rises by machine-gun fire or fist-sized entry wounds from rocket-propelled grenades. Even in broad daylight, it was difficult to find signs of damage from the fifteen-year civil conflict and the intermittent clashes that lingered on well into the early twenty-first century.

Meanwhile, America's Civil War II had been over for nearly five years. The rebels had fled the battlefield and taken up exile in Europe, Latin America, and Australia. Yet, judging from the Department's daily intelligence brief, there seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of anti-Unionist insurgents, traitors, and saboteurs both at home and abroad. Linder wondered whether America's civil

conflict would last as long as Lebanon's and, if so, whether he'd be alive to see it end.

Lately he had come to doubt it and questioned whether his luck might be running out. He had posed as a rebel too many times, used too many aliases and disguises, and lured too many exiles to death or captivity not to have been noticed by the exile insurgent networks and the foreign intelligence services that supported them. Unless Headquarters gave him some time to cool off in another part of the world, he might fall victim to their retaliation. And even if the insurgents didn't find him, the worsening climate of purges within the Department itself might pose no less a threat.

While passing the AUB gate on the dimly lit Rue Clemenceau, Linder noticed headlights behind him. As they drew closer, a silver Renault slowed and pulled to the curb just ahead. The driver reached across the passenger seat to open the door and Linder stepped in.

"You're late. The Chief is waiting," Denniston announced casually as the car began to move.

"Why the rush?" Linder asked.

"It's Bob's last week before home leave. He's booked a table at a very swell night club to celebrate and doesn't want to be late."

"Good heavens. Better step on it, then."

Denniston laughed before descending toward the seaside Corniche and the chief's residence.

As they wound to the east past the site of the 1983 U.S. Embassy bombing, Linder saw no trace of the wreckage. In place of ruins were stately seaside high-rises and elegant boutiques and nightspots of the kind that Linder had not seen in the U.S. since before the Events. He found it difficult to comprehend how a tiny third-world country like Lebanon could have revived so quickly from the natural disasters, social upheaval, and global economic crises that had brought America to her knees less than a decade earlier. Lebanon possessed few natural resources, a negligible industrial base, and little capital of its own, and yet it functioned as a global banking center, commercial entrepot, and tourist hub for the entire Middle East. To Linder, it seemed a sort of cosmopolitan time capsule from the pre-Events world. Tonight, he decided, he would shake off his gloom, accept the world as it was, and receive what Beirut had to offer.

Ten minutes later the Renault stopped outside a walled villa on a cul-de-sac a few hundred meters west of the former Green Line, the historic buffer zone dividing predominantly Muslim West Beirut from the Christian East

Side. Having visited the villa years earlier when it had been the residence of the CIA's Deputy Chief of Station, he inferred that it was now the residence of the DSS Base Chief. It seemed shabbier now and in serious need of repair, but the scent of night-flowering jasmine still saturated the moist night air from the thousands of white blossoms that spilled from the ancient vines overhanging the compound's walls.

Denniston pressed a button at the rusted iron gate, and a few moments later the latch buzzed open. They stepped into an untended garden that must have been magnificent once, its stately palms and ancient frangipani trees ringing the perimeter wall. Ceramic tiles swirled with intricate Arabesque patterns over the villa's columned portico. The weathered teak door opened the moment they reached it.

Standing in the threshold was a bull-necked man of about forty-five in white linen trousers and a loose-fitting batik shirt unbuttoned halfway down his chest and bulging across an ample waist. The Base Chief's florid face, neck, and arms were beaded with perspiration. In his hand, he held an oversized tumbler half-filled with ice and a pale amber liquid that Linder assumed was Scotch. The Chief's eyes were glassy and unfocused.

"It's been a long time," Bob Bednarski began in a wary monotone as he offered Linder a fleshy hand with a band of scar tissue across the knuckles. The chief spoke with a thick Cleveland twang reflecting his blue-collar origins. Linder recalled from past encounters that this vulgar bear of a man delighted in shocking subordinates with his crude and profane vocabulary, a relic of his combat tours in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and along the Great Lakes during CWII. His career largely rested on his achievements in the latter conflict, when he was DSS Base Chief for Northern Ohio during the Battle of Cleveland.

"We've come a long way since Cleveland," Linder responded with a genial smile.

"Want a drink?" Bednarski offered, avoiding eye contact and taking a bold swig from the crystal tumbler. "I've been saving the last bottle of Glenlivet to celebrate the end of my tour. Just can't get decent Scotch at home any more."

"Sure, I'll have some," Linder agreed.

To Linder's surprise, Denniston declined.

"Come with me," Bednarski said as he led them inside. "Ignore the mess."

The corridor leading from the front door into the library was choked with unopened boxes of luxury goods

rarely seen on the shelves of America's state-controlled retail stores. Even in voucher shops, open only to the Unionist Party nomenklatura, such a variety of Irish crystal, Swiss watches, French perfumes, English woolens, Italian leather, and other luxury items was rarely found. The wares stacked in the corridor must have cost tens of thousands of dollars, even at the discounts offered by Beirut's shady dealers in pirated and smuggled goods. The chief's salary certainly didn't cover this kind of shopping spree.

Bednarski led Linder and Denniston into the darkened library and closed the door behind them. Though its paneled walls were bare and its books were stacked in boxes, an obsolete American flag showing a full complement of fifty stars hung across the empty shelves. Bednarski filled a tumbler with ice from a silver tray on an antique sideboard and poured three fingers of Glenlivet before handing it to Linder. The cold glass sent a shiver up Linder's arm. Without thinking, he discarded half the ice before taking his first sip.

Denniston stood two paces behind the Base Chief, in deference to the older man. Though he, as a Branch Chief in the DSS's Emigré Division, ranked a shade higher than his host, Denniston was careful not to pull rank on a man who

had once been his commanding officer and who, by Department regulation, remained the senior DSS official in charge in Lebanon.

"I want to make it clear that it wasn't my idea to bring you here, Linder," Bednarski began, giving his visitor a stern look. "Over the past year or so we've driven the expat insurgent network out of Beirut by handling things in our own quiet way. Instead of trying to infiltrate each of the rebel cells that operated here, we've focused on the money trail, persuading the Lebanese banks not to protect their secret bank accounts. And we haven't lost a single agent or prompted a single diplomatic protest doing it."

"Good for you, Bob," Linder answered with a sideways look. "If things are going so well around here, why did you send for me?"

Linder recalled that, the last time he had served under Bednarski, the chief had blamed him for an embarrassing setback that Linder had warned him to avoid. Bednarski pursed his lips and eyed him warily.

"Headquarters wants us to take one last crack at Philip Eaton before my replacement comes and, for whatever reason, they seem to think you're the man for the job."

"Ah, now I get it," Linder replied. "You guys couldn't get your hands on Eaton's money through the banks, so you want me to help you take it out of his hide some other way." He fished the remaining ice from his glass with three fingers and dumped it onto the ice bucket's polished silver tray.

"Well, if you could persuade him to return to the States..." Denniston suggested.

"Eaton? Repatriate? Not bloody likely," Linder shot back as he swirled the pale liquid in his glass.

"All right, then, how about luring him somewhere we can snatch him? Greece, Cyprus, Italy, I couldn't care less where he goes," Bednarski replied, "so long as we get our hands on him and Uncle Sam claims his due. But you'd have to make it look voluntary. We wouldn't want to spook our Lebanese hosts."

"Eaton is too cagey to fall for anything obvious. It could take months to gain his trust—if we succeed at all," Linder said.

"Fine. You have three days," the chief declared.

"Think of something."

"You can't be serious," Linder objected, setting down his whiskey glass.

"Damned serious. Division Chief's orders," Bednarski answered.

"What makes you think Eaton is even worth the trouble? How much money does he have left these days?"

"Bank records show he transferred at least thirty or forty million of his own funds out of the country when the President took over," Denniston reported. "Headquarters estimates that at one time he controlled five or ten times that in rebel funds looted from the downtown Cleveland banks. It's a well-established fact that Eaton masterminded the operation and has served as a kind of trustee for the stolen money ever since."

"So I recall," Linder agreed.

"Then maybe you also recall Eaton's new son-in-law, Roger Kendall," Bednarski continued, watching closely for Linder's reaction. "He's been trying to put Eaton together with exile groups in the U.K. and Europe who need funding for their stateside operations. Did Neil brief you on your meeting with Kendall tomorrow?"

"Got it covered, boss," Denniston interrupted. "The plan is for me to be at his hotel tomorrow at ten sharp with a disguise technician."

Linder raised an eyebrow at Denniston. It seems the latter had not told him all he needed to know.

"In that case," Linder announced testily, "unless there's more to discuss, I'd like to get some dinner and go to bed."

"Fine, then, let's go," the chief agreed, emptying his glass and leaving it on the sideboard.

"Go where?" Linder asked.

"The Lido. I reserved a table at eight. The belly dancers start at ten."

Linder shook his head in disbelief before making a silent appeal to Denniston.

"I don't know, Chief," Denniston broke in. "We've got a long day ahead. Besides, it might not be such a good idea for the three of us to be seen together."

"Screw security," Bednarski spat, waving broadly with drink in hand. "Hell, nobody knows you or Linder around here."

"It's very nice of you to invite me," Linder responded, still not stirring from the spot. "But, really, I ought to get some rest..."

"Nonsense. You have to eat somewhere," Bednarski insisted. "Believe me, it'll be the meal of a lifetime. Tonight is Nour Al-Said's last performance in Beirut before she goes on tour in the Gulf. Hell, you can't miss that."

And without another word, Bednarski put down his drink and headed for the door. The two younger men exchanged troubled glances, swallowed hard, and followed. Each knew that Bednarski could not be stopped, and neither wanted to pay the price for obstructing him.

Bednarski drove them north in his classic 2012 Mercedes-Benz sedan through narrow lanes and alleys to Beirut's legendary nightlife district on Phoenicia Street. Judging from the fawning attitude of the Lido's parking attendant, Bednarski must have been a regular there. The maître confirmed this by leading the three Americans to a choice table close to the dais where the Egyptian orchestra was playing, and snapping his fingers at a team of liveried waiters to bring on the deluxe hundred-dish mezzé. By now, Linder's appetite was whetted and the meal turned out to be every bit as delicious as the Chief of Base had promised. With the aid of some delicious Ksara Blanc de Blancs and Chateau Musar Reserve, the time before the start of the show slipped by far more agreeably than Linder had expected. That the ambient noise in the club was too loud to permit much conversation added to his pleasure.

Though the headline dancer, Nour Al-Said, was well past her prime, her once legendary beauty remained evident behind heavy make-up while her ripe figure conveyed the

deep sensuality of mature experience. Nour and the three younger dancers who followed her danced to near-exhaustion, accompanied by a tireless twenty-piece Egyptian orchestra who played a continuous score of deep, brooding music that set Linder's mind wandering to far-off places and times. Each dancer began her routine on the dance floor directly before the dais, then roamed from table to table, making a lengthy pass at the Americans, where Bednarski, a married man with teenaged daughters, tucked many a twenty-dollar bill into bras and G-strings.

Though a bachelor and no stranger to belly dance clubs, Linder kept his wallet in his pocket, not wanting to draw added attention. After the first two dancers, his mind wandered. Having worked under cover almost continuously since joining the CIA more than a decade ago, and transferring to the DSS after that, he had missed the usual range of opportunities to form lasting relationships with women. Those with whom he had paired off in brief casual relationships had come and gone from his life over the years. None had loved him; of that he was fairly certain. He could think of only one who might have, and that was so long ago that it hardly counted any more. He tried to recall her face, as he did now and again, but it receded into an alcoholic haze.

At last, the final belly dancer left the floor at the Lido, yet Bednarski still refused to call it a night. Waving aside any security concerns or claims of fatigue, he insisted on dragging the younger men to two more watering holes along Phoenicia Street. Against his better judgment, Linder went along. Without Denniston's support, he knew that escape was not yet a viable option and so he limited his alcohol intake by nursing his whiskey and ordering frequent mineral water chasers.

By now, Linder had come to notice the exaggerated deference shown to their small party by the various touts and barkeeps they met along Phoenicia Street. Apparently, Bednarski was a regular everywhere, acting like a rich playboy on what Linder now suspected were the confiscated fortunes of captured rebel émigrés. Linder found the chief's flashiness as dangerous as it was repellent, since it raised a host of fresh doubts about Bednarski's judgment in the pending operation against Philip Eaton.

Dawn was nearly upon them when Linder and Denniston finally stuffed the chief into a taxi and sent him home, with a parking attendant following close behind in Bednarski's vintage Mercedes. Linder arrived at the Hotel Cavalier in a separate cab just as a rosy glow began to suffuse the eastern sky over the Sannine Mountains.

S2

Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you
commit atrocities. **Voltaire**

SEPTEMBER, FRIDAY, WEST BEIRUT

When the alarm rang at nine-thirty, Linder lowered his feet to the floor and sat on the edge of the bed. The morning sun glared at him from the east window, forcing him to lower his gaze to avoid the painful light. He picked up the bedside phone and dialed.

"Room service? Send up two cups of Arabic coffee, medium sweet, two large bottles of sparkling mineral water and a basic mezzé for two. I'll pay double if you can get it here in fifteen minutes."

Linder's temples throbbed and he felt as if the room were rotating. His pajamas stank with sour alcoholic sweat. He shuffled into the white-tiled bathroom and, for a moment, could not decide whether his stomach cramps were commanding him to sit upon or kneel before the porcelain throne. He wished he'd had the sense to vomit before going to bed, for now the whiskey, arak, wine, and brandy would punish him for hours until they were completely metabolized.

Linder opened all four windows to vent the room's stale air, then retreated to the shower, alternating at one-minute intervals the hottest water he could stand with the coldest. He had been scrubbing and shampooing for nearly a quarter of an hour when his meal arrived. He answered the door in his bathrobe, still dripping, and stood aside while the waiter set a place for him to eat. As promised, Linder offered a 100% gratuity, which the young man accepted with evident delight before he hurried out the door.

As Linder sipped his first cup of coffee, Neil Denniston arrived with the disguise technician, an attractive Hispanic woman of about thirty with an eye-catching figure. After introducing herself by first name only, the technician opened what appeared to be an oversized purse, removed a disguise kit shaped to fit the bag's interior, and laid out its contents on the coffee table. Denniston looked on in silence, his eyes concealed behind wraparound French sunglasses that made him appear in far better shape than Linder. Meanwhile, Linder's eyes strayed to the disguise artist's shapely derriere and held their focus there.

"You shouldn't have tried to keep up with him," Denniston opened at last. "I swear, Bednarski has the

constitution of a satyr. The only way I manage to stay on my feet is to water my drinks from the start."

"I'll remember that next time," Linder scowled. "Would you two care to join me for breakfast?"

Denniston sniffed at the garlic-laced Lebanese specialties on the table and waved away the fumes with disgust. "It's not exactly what I would have picked to soothe a troubled gut." The disguise technician wrinkled her nose and turned away, too.

"It's not about being appetizing," Linder replied. "I need the garlic to mask the odor of alcohol oozing from my pores. Mormon Joe isn't supposed to be a boozer, you know."

Denniston covered his eyes in mock shame.

"Sorry, bud, it totally slipped my mind..."

"Sure it did," Linder replied between mouthfuls of tabbouleh.

"Okay, whatever," Denniston continued, helping himself to the spare bottle of Perrier on Linder's breakfast tray. "The point is, Mormon Joe is the only rebel Philip Eaton has even considered meeting face-to-face in more than six months. It's only after you spent the last two months posing as Joe Tanner with expats all across Southern Europe that we finally attracted Eaton's attention. For some odd

reason, the Mormon Return Movement has piqued his interest."

"I still don't get it," Linder replied. "Of all the rebel causes, why would Eaton care about the forced relocation of Mormons from Utah?" Linder asked. "His ties have always been to the Great Lakes."

The disguise technician waved Linder over to a chair she had carried into the bathroom so she could shampoo, cut and color Linder's hair. He wolfed down the remaining tabbouleh, then followed her with Denniston in tow.

"Maybe because the Great Lakes insurgency has been moribund for over a year," Denniston answered a moment later. "And because Eaton's prime contact in the Cleveland militias has gone missing. Which means that Eaton is sitting on a war chest with no troops to spend it. For somebody committed to overthrowing the Unionists, that can't be very satisfying."

"Maybe so," Linder agreed. "But that still doesn't mean he'll back Tanner. Eaton is too smart to let the money burn a hole in his pocket. He'd rather wait for the right deal to come along."

"Even if he does, I think Tanner is still our best bet under the circumstances," Denniston asserted. "The MRM carries a compelling story and, if we can get Eaton to make

even a single wire transfer, Headquarters will be able to trace the money back to the source and grab it."

"And if Eaton doesn't bite?"

"We back off and take a different approach," Denniston continued. "We've got too much riding on Tanner and the MRM in other exile sting operations to risk compromising them with Eaton."

"Maybe we should request electronic surveillance to follow the chatter among the exile networks."

"Done that," Denniston agreed. "We've also got audio and video coverage of Eaton's living room, dining room, and kitchen if you get that far. If the listening post picks up any sign you might be at risk there, we could have a security team dressed in Lebanese *gendarme* uniforms drop in within fifteen seconds."

"I like that," Linder nodded.

"All right, then," Denniston addressed the disguise expert, "Let's go, Chiquita. Time to turn this man into Joe Tanner."

"If you call me that one more time, wise-ass, I'll slug you," the woman replied without looking up. "The name is Rosita."

"Well, excuse me, senorita. My Spanish not so good, you know," Denniston replied offhandedly and turned away.

An hour later, the disguise artist raised a mirror to Linder's face. He had become accustomed to this transformation in recent months. His usually dark brown hair, eyebrows, and beard stubble were now a light brown or dirty blond; his brown eyes were covered with blue contact lenses; and his bite and his diction were altered with a dental prosthesis. He wore a charcoal business suit over a starched white shirt and regimental tie and, while resembling the stereotypical Latter-day Saints missionary, also could have easily passed for one of the legion of Russian or German businessmen who frequented the city's commercial districts.

Once Linder and the technician had compared the details of his transformation to control photographs and initialed the disguise checklist, Denniston dismissed her and remained behind for Linder's final briefing before the afternoon meeting with Kendall. Under normal circumstances, far more time would have been allotted for the final pre-op briefing, which would have been preceded by days of study and rehearsal. By comparison, the preparation for this operation had been unaccountably shoddy.

When the session finished, Denniston rose from the stuffed chair opposite Linder's bed as if to leave. But before he could offer any parting words, Linder strode to

the window, looked outside, then turned around to address his colleague. "Listen, Neil," he began. "I've been feeling kind of strung out lately and I guess I haven't recognized just how far I've pushed my luck the last few years. I haven't told anyone else, but I have had dreams most nights now and it's been hard to get enough sleep to stay on top of my game. I think my body is telling me it's time to back off a bit."

Linder watched for Denniston's reaction and, seeing his face become an expressionless mask, decided to continue whether the Desk Chief liked it or not.

"I think it may be time for me to do a tour at Headquarters. But the idea has me a little worried. Sometimes I get the sense that certain people back there resent my staying out in the field so long and see me as a pampered prima donna. I won't name names, but I have it on good authority that some of the people I've relied on for support may have turned on me."

"And how would you like me to help?" Denniston responded, folding his arms across his chest and looking askance at Linder.

"I'm not exactly sure, but maybe you could sound out the powers-that-be about my coming home short of tour," Linder ventured.

Denniston listened quietly before crossing to the window and laying a cold hand on Linder's shoulder.

"Believe me, Warren," he replied firmly. "I know exactly how you feel. But this is not the time to throttle back. Our work isn't done until we have uprooted the last vestiges of the insurgency at home and flushed out every last rebel financier hiding overseas."

Taken aback at such a doctrinaire response from a fast-and-loose guy like Denniston, Linder suppressed an urge to laugh.

"Now, don't get me wrong, Neil," he began with a conciliatory smile. "I don't want to come across as a shirker, but what you're saying seems like an awfully tall order. Eliminate all opposition at home and abroad? That would take generations. Meanwhile, I need some R & R fast."

"It's your choice, pal," Denniston answered. "I'll see what I can do. But, right now, we could really use your help in rolling up Old Man Eaton. Not only is he an insurgent financier with enough money stashed away to keep his pot boiling for years, but the old man is also a recognized leader within the insurgent movement. It will be a major score to roll him up and, when we do, you'll own a piece of it."

"And how would that work, exactly?" Linder questioned.

"For one thing, consider your next promotion in the bag. As it happens, I'll be sitting on your promotion panel this year. And if that's not enough to push you over the top, the Chief of Operations owes Bob some favors. So, play ball with us a bit longer and you can have virtually any slot you want when we're done."

Linder returned Denniston's expectant gaze with a weary nod. "All right. I'll do my part if you do yours. Let's get on with it," he said. "

"Good. Now, go as far as you can with Eaton, but don't overdo it," Denniston warned. "Better to return for another pass than scare him off."

Without bothering to respond, Linder stepped to the nightstand, picked up the phone and called the front desk for a taxi. A moment later, he turned to Denniston.

"Okay, I'm off. It may be a few minutes before my ride comes, so please wait ten or fifteen before going down. I don't want the desk clerk to connect us."

"Sure thing," Denniston answered after emptying his bottle of Perrier. "But there is one more complication. The surveillance team reported this morning that Roger didn't come alone, after all. His wife and stepdaughter are staying with him at the Sofitel. So far, they haven't been

to Eaton's apartment, but I thought you ought to know they're in town."

"Patricia Kendall? Here in Beirut?" Linder asked, his voice rising.

"Apparently they arrived from the Continent, which is why surveillance didn't pick them up earlier. Why does it matter? Do you think she might recognize you? You two haven't crossed paths before, have you?" Denniston searched his colleague's face closely.

Linder shook his head and looked away.

"No, it just complicates things, that's all. I don't like it when targets have their families around during a meeting. You can never be sure where things will lead with wives and kids."

"Don't worry, pal. They won't be at the flat. Eaton's not that stupid," Denniston said, approaching Linder so that he was cornered between nightstand and bed. "But, come to think of it, you were posted to London around the time that Eaton and the Kendalls arrived, weren't you? Are you sure you didn't cross paths?"

"We overlapped for a while but I never ran into them," Linder answered, stepping around Denniston to straighten his tie in the wall mirror.

"And not before then, in Cleveland, maybe? Didn't you grow up in the same part of town as the Eatons? Over on the East Side, by Shaker Heights and the University, where all the rich people used to live?" Denniston now stood directly behind him so that the two men looked at each other in the mirror.

"Not exactly, Neil," Linder retorted. "Our house was in Lyndhurst and the Eaton estate was in Gates Mills. They're only about five miles apart, but Gates Mills was a different world." Evading the Branch Chief, Linder checked his watch as if to point out that it was time for him to be on his way. But Denniston would not be put off.

"Okay, but if you lived in different worlds, how do you explain this?" he asked, pulling a folded clump of papers from his pocket and handing it to Linder. To Linder's astonishment, the first page was a photocopy of a newspaper article about the Cotillion Ball and the Cleveland debutantes presented to society that year, including Patricia Eaton. The following page included a photocopy of an annotated guest list showing Linder's name with a check mark next to it, and a photograph showing a wide-eyed Warren Linder dancing with a less than enthusiastic Patricia Eaton.

"Granted, it's going back pretty far, but it's not the kind of thing a guy would easily forget—not when the party is for someone as rich and good-looking as Patricia Eaton. What do you say, does this refresh your memory?"

Denniston took a seat on the bed and waited in silence while Linder inspected the papers.

Linder's heart sank. The newspaper article was in the public domain, but the DSS could have obtained the guest list only by means of an informant in the Eaton household. If they had this kind of material, what else might they have on him?

Linder took a long look at the photograph before raising his head to offer Denniston a sheepish grin.

"It wasn't one of my happier nights, which is probably why I buried the memory," Linder explained truthfully. "As I recall, the only reason I would have been invited was because Patricia and I had been in ballroom dance class together in seventh grade. We had just run into each other at a dance in Boston while away at boarding school and I expect the party planners needed some extra boys from the right schools to provide gender balance. They must have reached pretty far down the list to get to me."

Denniston nodded and stuffed the papers back into his jacket pocket before responding.

Linder sensed from this that Denniston had noticed his embarrassment and believed his story to be true. If so, Denniston might be willing to deep-six the documents and thereby prevent some paranoid counterintelligence analyst from launching an investigation. He shuddered to think of what could happen if Bob Bednarski had found the documents. But, with Denniston, a favor always came at a price and, until it was paid, his old friend would hold the upper hand.

"All right," Denniston conceded at last. "I'll let it go. But you'd better not be hiding anything else, buddy. If you do anything to screw up this operation, there will be hell to pay."

Linder nodded in solemn agreement while praying that his story would hold.

* * *

Shortly before one o'clock, Warren Linder exited the cab and straightened his tie again in the display window of a trendy men's clothing boutique near Place Sassine in Christian East Beirut. He was now fully in character as Joe Tanner, diehard Mormon rebel leader, eagerly awaiting the opportunity to meet Roger Kendall, offshore banker to the anti-Unionist insurgency.

According to the cover legend developed for the operation, Tanner had traveled by freighter from Vancouver to Korea on an alias Australian passport, then boarded a flight to Dubai, and then another to Beirut with help from a friendly Asian intelligence service. He had risked his life to escape, and would risk it once again on his return in order to win the financial and operational support of wealthy American emigrés like Kendall and Eaton.

In Tanner's mind, the survival of the persecuted Mormon Church and the very lives of his coreligionists depended on winning support from Roger Kendall and his influential father-in-law. More than a million Mormons were now languishing in resettlement camps in Alaska and the U.S.-occupied Yukon, having been forcibly removed from Utah and Idaho during the insurgency when the President-for-Life declared the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a terrorist organization. The Mormons now demanded a "right of return" to their ancestral homeland in Utah and the Mormon Return Movement was created to fulfill it.

Linder remained before the display window when a well-heeled foreigner in a raw silk suit passed behind him carrying a shopping bag with the Dunhill logo. The man was slightly shorter than average height but exuded an air of confident authority that befit a former Wall Street law

partner like Roger Kendall. Linder waited until Kendall had advanced twenty or thirty paces, then followed him up Rue Sioufi toward the Place Sassine.

Seen from behind, Kendall gave the impression of someone intensely aware of being watched but affecting not to care. The perfect tailoring of Kendall's bespoke suit, his bronzed complexion, the freshly trimmed gray sideburns, all contributed to Linder's assessment that, despite the impeccably groomed shell of the former corporate litigator, inside dwelled a hollowed-out soul like that of hundreds of rebel exiles he had known since the fall of the Third American Republic.

These men had escaped Unionist America with their money but had left behind their businesses, their professions, their contacts, their clubs, their neighborhoods, their charities, their connectedness to the communities that defined who they were. Linder had come to know men like Kendall during his student years at Exeter, Kenyon, and Columbia. Good-looking, sophisticated, well-traveled youths from Greenwich and Rye, Brookline and Cambridge, Wilmington and Philadelphia's Main Line, who by young adulthood had little time to spare for anyone outside their interconnected circles of privilege.

Linder guessed that, until he ran short of funds, Kendall had not even attempted to circumvent the prohibition on gainful employment that was a condition of his British residence permit. According to reports in his DSS file, Kendall had never intended to start a fresh life in London; rather, he had hoped to resurrect his old one once the Unionist regime collapsed. But this hadn't happened, and it was why Linder considered Kendall vulnerable to a covert appeal to return, and it was why the man would likely meet his end in a Unionist labor camp.

Linder caught up to Kendall as he entered a small Lebanese-style patisserie and lingered by the door as the headwaiter pointed Kendall to a table at the rear. Linder followed and took the seat opposite the elegant-looking expatriate, who gave him a smile that exuded both charm and a hint of dissipation.

"Excuse me, but didn't we meet in Larnaca?" Linder asked, reciting the pre-arranged recognition signal.

"I believe we did. You had come from Aphrodite's Cave," Kendall answered, giving the correct countersign.

Linder reached across the table to shake Kendall's hand, holding it for an extra beat and making full eye contact to show that he considered himself Kendall's peer.

"Joe Tanner. I assume our mutual friends in Athens told you why I've come."

"They did, and I'm eager to hear more," Kendall replied, withdrawing his hand. "Shall we order coffee? Philip ought to be back at the flat in a short while."

The waiter appeared with a tray of syrupy Lebanese pastries and held it out for their approval.

"Care to try one?" Kendall suggested. "They're much better than they look."

Linder waved them away.

"Actually, what I crave at the moment is some of that delicious local eggplant dip."

"Baba ghannouj?"

"Yeah, that's the stuff," Linder affirmed. "With a large bottle of mineral water."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot—you Mormons don't drink coffee, do you?"

"No, but you go right on ahead," Linder answered. He bit his lip, realizing that he had nearly undone himself, momentarily forgetting that Mormons drank neither coffee nor tea.

The waiter took their orders and retreated to the kitchen.

"How long ago did you leave Utah, Mr. Tanner? Had the Party released the New Economic Plan by the time you left?"

Linder shook his head. Fortunately, he had done his homework on the much-heralded about-face in Unionist economic policy. But Kendall had clearly taken the offensive and he would have to match him point for point.

"No, I left in July and everyone was still holding his breath. Our sources were optimistic that the new regulations would go far to restore private ownership of capital. There was even some talk about the government reopening the stock exchanges and selling off some of the nationalized industries. But nobody expected anything quite as far-reaching as the NEP turned out to be."

Roger Kendall exhaled deeply and his eyes took on a faraway look. Perhaps his question about the NEP reflected wishful thinking.

"If the Party makes good on its promises this time, every transatlantic airline seat to New York will be booked for months. I wonder if it's too early to project..." Kendall's voice trailed off.

Linder smiled inwardly at Kendall's willing suspension of disbelief. "If I were you, I wouldn't project too much just yet," he answered. "It could all be a sham. They've done it enough times by now, you'd think people would see

through their..." Here was an opening to position himself as a hardheaded realist rather than a wild-eyed rebel.

"Yes, I know," Kendall interrupted, "but since the President's death, perhaps..."

"Don't kid yourself," Linder countered. "The Unionist machine will be just as vicious under a new President-for-Life as it was with the old one. Unless the entire Party apparatus is destroyed root and branch, nothing will change, believe me."

Linder hardened his features into a grim mask calculated to project a deep unhappiness at being separated from everything that made Joe Tanner who he was. Fully in character now, he felt a visceral resentment toward hypocrites like Kendall who would reconcile with the Unionists when it suited them and look aside while the regime smashed all genuine opposition.

At that moment, the waiter reappeared with coffee, mineral water, and Linder's bread and baba ghannouj, which he devoured with uncommon relish. Linder took extra care to scoop up the loose bits of garlic at the edge of the bowl and hoped the pungent odor was as potent inside his body as it was outside. Kendall watched him eat with an amused expression.

"Before we go any further," Kendall continued after he finished his coffee and cast a wary look around the room, "perhaps you could give me a brief idea of what you'd like to discuss with us. I have a fairly good idea of where Philip's interests lie. Perhaps I might be able to guide you."

Now it was Linder's turn to cast furtive glances over Kendall's shoulder and to either side.

"All right," Linder began. "The reason I'm here is to raise funds for the political organization that we call the Mormon Return Movement. The MRM is not an arm of the LDS church, but a secular group created to pave the way for Latter-day Saints and other people of faith to resettle and rebuild Utah and the historically Mormon areas of Idaho, Wyoming, and northern Arizona. We have reconnected with members of the Mormon Diaspora all across the country and have built a strong underground network. Very soon our overseas supporters will be able to come and see for themselves what their donations are achieving."

"And just how do you plan to do that?" Kendall asked, cocking a skeptical eyebrow.

"We've managed to recruit highly placed sympathizers inside the Unionist apparatus who stand to profit from redevelopment. They've already shown their good faith by

arranging safe passage for our members into the restricted zones from other parts of the country. By early next year, we also expect to infiltrate some of our overseas supporters via certain Gulf Coast ports and bring them up to safe areas near Salt Lake, Ogden, and Provo. So, if you decide to pay us a visit, be sure to bring your greenbacks and gold, because there will be once-in-a-lifetime investment opportunities for those who come early."

Linder dipped another piece of bread in the eggplant dish, while Roger Kendall sat back and ran a manicured hand through his slicked-back hair.

"That's impressive," the lawyer answered, reaching for his demitasse of sweet Arabic coffee. "To come and go from a restricted zone right under the regime's nose is quite a coup. I had assumed that the borders were still sealed. But why should a non-Mormon from Cleveland back your group when rebel outfits all across the Midwest need his help?"

Linder had expected this objection and lowered his voice. Kendall would have to lean forward to hear his response.

"Because we're better organized, more energetic, and younger. And even more, we've chosen nonviolence. Before the Events, Utah had the fastest-growing economy in the country, the highest birth rate of any state, and the

highest voter turnout against the President-for-Life's reelection bid. With the rest of the country in a shambles, and the restricted zones cut off from view, we can mount a stealth campaign to outbreed, outgrow, and co-opt the Unionist parasites that the regime has left in charge over us. I have plenty of data to back that up, along with a five-year plan..."

Kendall held up a hand and nodded impatiently.

"I see you've come well-prepared, Joe. Perhaps Philip would be interested. Have the two of you ever met?"

"I've not had that pleasure," Linder lied. It had been long ago, and Linder was sure that Eaton had forgotten his conversation with the teenager he was at the time. But Linder had not.

"I'm sure you won't be disappointed," Kendall replied, "though I must disclose my bias since Philip happens to be my father-in-law."

Something about the man's self-satisfied grin irritated Linder and made him bristle at the thought that this was Patricia Eaton's husband. Had the Events not intervened, he thought, Patricia surely would never have married an empty suit like Kendall. Linder finished the baba ghannouj quickly and washed it down with the last of the mineral water, signaling the waiter to bring more.