

X

Madison could see Paris only as the impressionists had taught him -- as a city of color, not lines. On a rainy autumn morning, the brushstrokes seemed wan and blurred, as if thin oils had mingled on the palette and bled on the canvas. Only a few scarfs and torn magazine covers glowed against a background of wet cement, slate roofs, limestone facades, and leafless branches.

He and Marta had stayed the night in his favorite hotel, a small establishment in the Latin Quarter. After coffee and croissants in the dining room, she left for a mysterious destination, and Madison rode the Métro to the suburb of St.-Denis. By ten o'clock, it was raining heavily, and there was so little light that streetlamps still glowed in this sooty district. Here Saint Denis had walked after his decapitation, carrying his head until he found a proper burial place; and here the first Gothic cathedral had been built as a mausoleum for the kings of France. But now St.-Denis was communist territory, grimy, poor, and militant.

Not far from the Basilica, Madison found the address that had been listed in the telephone book under "clairvoyante gitane: Mme Sosostriis." Between a boulangerie and a newsagent, he saw a narrow door with a dozen names handwritten on a directory. He pressed the button next to "Sosostriis." When he heard a buzz, he pulled the door open and climbed a long flight of steps. A dentist and a shipping agent had their offices on the second floor. Another flight brought him to a dingy landing with three doors. Hanging on the middle door was a porcelain plate in the shape of a raised palm, inscribed with tiny Hebrew letters.

He knocked: no answer. He turned the handle and left the hallway for a cluttered waiting room. Inside, he saw ramshackle furniture covered with batik shawls, circus posters and chests painted in dark primary colors, china dolls in cabinets, and hats that hung from the walls. The bold but weathered hues reminded him of a gypsy caravan. He stopped to examine a toy carousel equipped with tiny unicorns and lions. A wooden evil eye, suspended on the wall, stared at him. He noticed that an interior door had been left ajar. He coughed and ventured a question: "Madame? Vous êtes ici?"

Hearing nothing, he peered into the second room. It was

bare except for a simple table with an oil lamp and a chair on each side. The chair closest to Madison was empty, but opposite sat a woman dressed in dark, lacy layers. She wore heavy makeup on her jowly cheeks and her eyebrows were unnaturally high, but there was something noble about her features. She was wreathed in cigarette smoke. On the table before her, Tarot cards had been laid in a complicated pattern. They were crude woodblock prints, perhaps made during the renaissance, and they had been colored by hand.

"Please sit down, monsieur," she said, without looking up. "I am surprised to see you alone, since you have traversed half the globe *avec une petite amie*. The cards tell me I would be fortunate to meet her."

"I heard you had a wicked pack," said Madison, taking a seat.

"Yes, but my cold is much better these days." She concealed a smile by drawing on her cigarette.

"So, I guess the clairvoyante in *The Waste Land* was named after you."

"The other way around. I am much in debt to Mr. Eliot."

"But you're a real gypsy reader?"

"I'm surprised at you, Professor. What difference would my ancestry make? I didn't know you were the type to interrogate a woman about her blood."

"I'm not. But the Romanies won't teach you much, will they, unless you're of pure stock."

"Fair enough. I have the right ancestors. Do you want a reading?"

"Perhaps a simple one. A two-card spread?"

"*Bien sûr*, whatever the customer wishes." She collected her cards and handed them to Madison. "Shuffle them please, thinking very carefully about what is most important to you. Keep shuffling: you must put your imprint on the order of the deck. Now cut it once. *Très bien*. Hand them to me, please."

She laid two cards face-up on the table so that they formed a cross. The lower card was largely obscured, but the upper one showed a tower being struck by lightning. The crown that had once topped it now teetered to one side. Two figures had leapt from burning windows: a youth in a red cloak and an old man

wearing a crown. Below, in archaic letters, the words "La Maison Dieu" had been printed: The House of God.

"How do you read this?" Madison asked.

Madame Sosostriis looked intently at him. "I see that you are engaged in a labor of synthesis, putting together what has been split apart, erecting a tower. At the psychological level, this is common enough -- but the card warns you against arrogance. The more we struggle for coherence, the further we may fall. The Tower of Babel, of course, represents this danger."

"You mentioned the psychological level. What other level could there be?"

"A cosmic one. The rabbis teach us that the world was formed according to the Creator's plan. Originally, he poured His light into perfect vessels. In time, these shattered, forming our visible world; but they struggle to recombine. Their struggle is *tikkun*, restoration, and its fulfillment will mark the end of days. Alas, those who labor at *tikkun* are often conceited, a sin that introduces more disunion. Perhaps the card is a warning to you as a scholar and investigator."

"Warning received. How about the second card?"

Madame Sosostriis removed the Tower to reveal a card that showed three standing figures beneath a flying cupid. "L'Amoureux," the legend said. Madison could not tell whether to translate it as "the lover" or "the lovers." The figures, too, were rather mysterious, their gestures odd and their forms androgynous, so that Madison was baffled by the image. "Who are the lovers, here?" he said.

"On one interpretation, the outer figures, a man and a woman, are being married by the person in the middle. In that case, the psychological implication of the card is obvious: you are as obsessed with love as with scholarship. In both cases, you wish to reunite what was never meant to be apart. On the other hand, some say that the figure in the middle is a man who must *choose* between two women."

"That's not me," said Madison, stoutly.

"Perhaps not, but I sense a choice looming -- a choice between two *objets d'amours*, even if only one is literally a lady."

"I appreciate your insights," said Madison. "You seem to know a great deal about me. But what of you? If I could read the

cards, I'd ask them to tell me *your* obsessions."

Madame Sosostris lit a new cigarette from the butt of her last one and said, "Like you, professor, I am engaged in research; I too want to put together the pieces of a puzzle."

"I assume that one piece is Tarot, and another is kabbalah."

"If only things were so simple. Look at these cards." She spread her whole deck face-down on the table. "Tarot is not a single piece of the puzzle, eh? It lies in a thousand shards, and so does kabbalah, so does alchemy, so does philosophy."

"Are you getting anywhere?"

"Oh yes."

"You think you'll succeed?"

"No. I think I'll die. It doesn't take my mean deck of cards to tell me there will be a catastrophe before this decade is done. This low, dishonest decade."

"You mean, a political disaster? Then why don't you flee France?"

"Perhaps I could flee, but my people can't. They won't escape the fires that are already being stoked for them. The answers that I seek lie neither in my head nor in my cards: they are held by my poor rambling nation. Before I can understand what my changeless people have always known, the history of Europe will overtake and destroy them."

"We're on the same track, then," said Madison. "The Nazis are the ones who're stoking the fires -- you know that -- and they want to appropriate the wisdom of your people. I'm hunting these hunters, but each time I catch up with them, they elude me. Now I want to pursue them as they seek gypsy wisdom. What knowledge would they want from your people? *Where* is it? If you send me to the source, I may be able to stop the Germans there. And perhaps I can help to preserve your secrets."

"I wouldn't tell you anything," said Madame Sosostris, "except that this is powerfully attached to your name." She reached into her bosom and removed a Tarot card from the pack that they had been studying. It showed a man with a sun behind his head. He stood before a tree stump, one leg crossed behind his opposite knee. On second thought, Madison realized that the legend was upside-down, so the youth was not standing; rather, he hung by a rope tied around his foot. "Le Perdu," said the insignia: the Lost

One.

"Am I the hanged man, then?" Madison knew all about this card, and he did not want to be associated with it, even though he was hardly a believer in Tarot.

"So it would seem."

"What does it mean?"

"Sacrifice, renunciation. The man in The Lovers who had to choose has now chosen. Like him, you will renounce whatever you should not have. Therefore, I will tell you where to go. Find the man they call Moolo Drúkkerébema. He will be wandering in the southeast counties of England. Tell him I sent you; and as a token, show him these cards in order: the six of pentacles, the wheel of fortune, the two of cups, and the sun. He will reveal what you want to know."

"Thank you very much," said Madison, starting to rise.

"Wait." She raised a palm and her eyes pierced Madison's skull. "I cannot see the end of your story, but the near future is grim. *Le Perdu* warns of loss. Remember: 'To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not, / You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.'"

"Are you quoting something I should recognize?"

"You will know it well enough in time."

Madison thought about her prophesy as he rode back to the city center and shopped in bookstores on the Left Bank. He knew a little Romany from fieldwork he'd done in Hungary, but he wanted a good phrasebook. He found one at last on the Boulevard St-Michel, where the students shopped. Armed with this, he returned to his hotel room to study.

It took him a while to realize what was missing in the room. He leapt from the bed where he'd been memorizing gypsy phrases and searched the closets, drawers, and bathroom. Every sign of Marta's presence was gone. There were no bags, no clothes, no cosmetic bottles, no papers. It was as if she'd never stayed the night.

Anxious, he rode the cage-like elevator to the ground floor and asked the concierge whether his wife had returned to the hotel.

"Non, monsieur. Today, I have never seen Madame."

So she hadn't passed by the main desk. Madison wondered whether she wanted him to flee; perhaps there was some danger.

But in that case, why would she have left his few belongings behind? And why wasn't there a note at the desk?

He returned to his bed and tried to study Romany vocabulary. The hours passed very slowly. By late in the afternoon, he was famished, so he left a note for Marta and went across the street to buy a sandwich.

He sat at a conspicuous café table until dusk. Perhaps she hadn't seen the note, he thought, returning to his room. He was disappointed to find the key hanging behind the desk, and there was no sign of Marta upstairs. He tried to work again, looking up every five minutes to check the time. Occasionally, he had an idea about where she might have left a note or other sign, but he never found anything. Whenever he heard a sound in the hall, he leapt to the door, his heart pounding, only to hear the footsteps pass by. He felt a touch of relief as well as dejection, for no one had come to hurt him or to give him terrible news.

By four in the morning, he'd managed to fall asleep. He awoke a few hours later and at first didn't remember what had been distressing him; but then he felt Marta's absence in the bed and stayed awake until dawn. At the earliest opportunity, he found a local *préfecture* and tried to file a missing-person report, but the *gendarmes* were not interested in an unmarried woman who hadn't returned to her hotel room one night. That's life, their faces seemed to say.

Clinging to hope, Madison returned to his hotel, but the key still hung behind the desk. For the first time, it occurred to him that Marta might have left him voluntarily. Perhaps she had collected enough information already; perhaps he was no longer useful to her. But wouldn't she have left some parting words, at least a letter? Or was their game on the Orient Express her way of saying goodbye?

With these thoughts in his mind, Madison wandered the neighborhood and then rushed back to his room -- which was as empty as before. By now, he was angry as well as agitated and afraid. He ran to the Métro and jumped on a packed train. He raced through the streets of St.-Denis, jammed his thumb on Madame Sosostri's bell, and took the steps three at a time.

"Where is she?" he panted.

"She has left already?" The clairvoyante sat just where she

had on the previous day, still wreathed in smoke, with her cards laid before her.

"I said: *Where is she?*" His teeth gritted, Madison towered over her; but she continued to study the spread.

"If I knew, I would tell you. Some things are visible, some things are dark."

"Damn it, you *knew* she would disappear. You can't hide behind these stupid cards." He swept them off the table. "You're working for St.-Germain, and you told him we'd arrived in Paris."

Madame Sosostris lifted her eyes for the first time -- her dark, unblinking eyes. She said, "How can you, of all people, blame the messenger? 'And I Tiresias have foresuffered all.' Have you no pity for me, for what I see? *I pity you.*"

Madison sat down wearily and almost sobbed. "What should I do?"

"Follow the trail. If she survives, she'll be at the evil's heart. You must go there too."

"So I should still see this gypsy fellow?" Madison had slumped across the table. "I don't know what else to do," he added.

"That's right, go first to Moolo, and then wherever he sends you. If your *belle dame* is free and wants to find you, she'll come here first. I'll send her on the right path. Meanwhile, you know your duty."

Before Madison left Paris, he went to the American Embassy, a grand palace near the Champs Élysée. He didn't want to arrive in Britain with a South African passport, because he doubted that he could carry off the accent or persuade a skeptical immigration officer that he was a former Royal Fusilier. Nor did he want to tell the American authorities that he was Madison Brown, a suspected Soviet agent. So he claimed to be his old Harvard friend, Wallace Pinkney, an eccentric naturalist who lived pretty much incommunicado in Wyoming. Madison explained that his passport had been stolen and that he needed to travel immediately to London. He was given temporary papers under Pinkney's name, and instructed to visit the American Embassy in Belgrave Square.

Late that evening, he saw the Dover cliffs from the deck of the Calais ferry. During the cruise, he had paced relentlessly between the snack bar and the bridge, drawing curious stares from the other passengers. Now he sprang down the ramp to dry land.

But there wasn't anything to do until the morning, so he found a room at a seaside B&B and slept fitfully until dawn.

He didn't really want to stay for breakfast, but to avoid offending his hostess, he gobbled down her eggs and fried bread, fried tomatoes and sausages. Then he walked west past Dover's docks, beneath a high citadel that had been built in the nineteenth century. A sign pointed uphill toward the "Church of the Knights Templar (ruin)": this intrigued Madison, but he passed it by. Instead, he waited until Dover's heights had subsided, then risen again into a spectacular bank of chalk cliffs. These he climbed, using a path with frequent steps. At last he reached a heath. Fertile Kent lay on one side, and the sea far below. A path had been worn a few feet from the edge: a chalk line through the cropped grass. As he walked, he said aloud: "How fearful / And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!" Peering over tufts of fern and heather, he saw the channel's waves crashing onto unnumbered idle pebbles; but their distant roar was just a murmur, quieter than the screams of the gulls over his head.

He walked until he reached a pub. He was the only guest in its cozy lounge, so he easily struck up a conversation with the proprietor over his half-pint of ale. Their talk shifted from the channel's weather to tourists and other visitors, at which point Madison ventured to ask: "Have you seen any gypsies about?"

"Aye, there's always a few," said the landlord, resting his heavy hands on the counter. His accent had the lilt of the English countryside. "Mind you, I 'aven't seen a caravan meself, not for a fortnight or more. But Mrs. 'Uxtable, she 'as a thievin' pair parked at the bottom of 'er garden, and she won't 'ave 'em moved on. A kind old soul is Rose 'Uxtable, but I reckon no good'll come of it. Gypsies *will* be gypsies."

Madison let the conversation wander to other topics, then paid and left. Across the street, a small shop sold newspapers, postcards, and candy. After buying *The Times*, he asked the owner if she knew a lady called Rosemary Huxtable.

Over half-moon glasses, she replied, "Mrs. Huxtable, bless her soul. Everyone knows dear Mrs. Huxtable. Are you looking for her, then? She lives at Ivy Cottage, Sunken Lane, near Barfreston."

Madison walked inland on a country road that sank between high hedgerows. Although it was December, the land was still pale

green and there were birds in the air. In the fields, bare hop vines hung from trellises. Nothing could be more comfortable and safe, he thought, than a Kentish lane. Neither sorcery nor totalitarian politics could exercise any power in this land of clipped hedges and thatched roofs, penny sweets and red post boxes.

Ivy Cottage was a low, half-timbered house out of Beatrix Potter. It stood at the top of a hill with a good deal of property behind it: first a country garden with herbaceous borders, then enough meadowland for two horses, then some woods, and finally a stream. A public footpath followed the edge of the property, so Madison avoided Mrs. Huxtable's house and descended directly to the bottom of her land. In a clearing near the stream, he saw a gypsy wagon painted yellow and green. A kettle hung over a small fire, and a pony chomped grass nearby. An old couple sat on the steps of their home, watching Madison approach.

He knew enough not to introduce himself boldly. For as long as anyone could remember, gypsy encounters with *gorgies* (outsiders) had always led to their persecution. A strange *gorgio* who approached a caravan generally wanted to move the Romanies along -- that is, if he didn't issue them a summons or throw them into leg-irons. Just "being a gypsy" had long been a punishable offense. So Madison walked past the wagon at some distance, nodded politely, and said, "*Sar shan?*" -- How are you?

Although he was in a great hurry to find Moolo Drúkkerébema, he wanted to avoid showing any signs of haste. So he tipped his hat, walked past, and spent the day at Barfreton, where there was a Norman church to admire. When opening-time finally arrived, he settled in the King's Arms and studied Romany vocabulary over another half-pint.

Just as the sun set, Madison passed the gypsies in the opposite direction. "*Sar shan,*" he said again. Since the couple was still there, he obviously hadn't frightened them too much. He approached cautiously, pointed to their wagon, and said, "That's a lovely *vardo.*"

The man nodded thanks, but his wife moved her sewing inside.

The gypsy's eyes were suspicious, his stance guarded. "I see you know a bit of the *puro jib,*" he said.

"*Arva,* I can *pen* just a bit and understand some more. In

Hungary, they used to call me *Romani rai*." This was true: Madison had earned the title "friend of gypsies" -- a name that was rarely bestowed, and even less often deserved.

"Can I 'elp you, then?"

"I'm looking for a man, actually. They call him Moolo Drúkkerébema." Madison wasn't sure what reaction this name would produce. As far as he could tell, it meant "Ghoul Prophecy" -- not exactly a neutral appellation. But he had no other name to use.

"Aye." The gypsy's face revealed nothing.

"Can you tell me where I might find him?"

"What's yer business, then?"

"I've been sent by a Romany lady who lives in France. I don't know her real name; to *gorgies*, she's Madame Sosostri. I realize that it's unusual for her to use a *gájikano* to bear a message to a *Rom*. But what I'm supposed to tell him, I can show you too." He held up the four Tarot cards in the order that Madame Sosostri had suggested.

"That's it?"

"That's it."

"Aye, well, when last I 'eard, his *atchen tan* lay near Tonbridge. The *monisha* and I are going that way ourselves. Will you join us in the morning?"

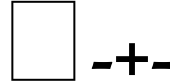
"Much obliged," said Madison.

He hiked back to Dover -- not a short walk -- and spent a second night in the B&B. By nine in the morning, he had returned to the bottom of Mrs. Huxtable's garden. All that remained of the gypsies was a burnt circle in the ground, marking the spot where their kettle had hung.

Madison was not surprised, nor did he draw any particular conclusion from the sudden departure of the wagon. Gypsies moved. Sometimes, they were herded away by policemen, but often they just decided to leave. He had been abandoned many times by Hungarian Romanies, only to meet the same caravan later and learn that no offense had been taken or meant. So Madison found his way to a bus stop, waited an hour for the bus to Dover, and then caught a train for Tonbridge.

This turned out to be a quaint market town with a few half-timbered buildings and a Norman castle. Madison walked into the

countryside, passing several traffic roundabouts and a sewage plant. Once he reached open fields, he carefully watched the margins of the road. Shortly after noon, by the side of a sheep meadow, he saw what he'd been looking for. Camouflaged in a pile of sticks were several that formed the following shape:



He recognized this as a *patteran*, a sign that one group of gypsies had left for others, to say that they had passed safely before. Madison was familiar with the shape. If the triangle were on top, then it would mean "sulphur," in the symbolism of alchemy. Here it was impossible to tell the orientation, but Madison guessed that the cross was meant to be uppermost. In that case, it was the chemical sign of the Philosopher's Stone, meaning that the alchemists' "great work" had been accomplished. Finally, in the system of Tarot, it indicated the twelfth card of the Major Arcana -- the Hanged Man.

So perhaps the *patteran* had been left for him. Madison followed the point of the triangle uphill through a herd of sheep: they watched him pass with their black faces. He climbed a stile and noticed another sign on the ground beyond the fence. This led him along a woodland path to a clearing that straddled a chalky ridge. He could no longer tell where to go, so he stopped until he noticed smoke wafting to his right. He tramped through a muddy thicket as a dog began to bark. And then, just a few feet away, he saw a whole gypsy caravan.

Four wagons had been parked in a box shape around a great fire. Dogs and ponies wandered the perimeter of the camp, and men sat on crates, whittling. One rose to his feet and approached Madison. He wore black stove-pipe trousers and a sagging hat. Several black-haired children watched from behind crates or hay bales, giggling shyly.

"*Sar shan?*" said Madison, showing both hands.

"Not bad, and you?"

"I'm alright. Were you expecting someone like me?"

"I reckon. D'you want to see the boss, then?"

Madison nodded.

"Wait 'ere."

The same gypsy returned a few minutes later with two companions: an ancient lady with wild white hair, and a man of about the same age who sported a bright yellow scarf under his velvet waistcoat.

"Are you the man they call Moolo Drúkkerébema?" said Madison.

"They call me that." The speaker had a deeply lined face, dark features, and a long nose.

"I have a message for you." Madison showed the Tarot cards.

"Aye, I was expecting you. It wasn't *dukking* that told me," he added, using the Romany word for fortune-telling. "No, I received a postcard from Paris."

"Oh, good." Madison was greatly relieved to hear this.

"Now, what is it exactly you want?" Moolo tucked his hands in his waistcoat pockets as the woman beside him examined Madison's face.

"Didn't the card explain?"

"Perraps, but there's no one 'ere as can read it. There was a picture I could *jin*, and Mulésko Dud signed the card with her mark, which I'd know anywhere. But beyond that, I don't *jin* nothin', exceptin' that you're a friend o' 'ers and a good *Rai*, and we ought to help you."

"Well," said Madison, "to be brief, I'm trying to stop the Nazis -- do you know who they are?"

"Aye."

"Well, you see, they hate the Romany people. They want to collect your secrets before they drive you to extinction. Since they already know some of the secrets of kabbalah and alchemy, they may be able to use your *páttrimíshi* to terrible effect. I must learn what they want to know, so that I can try to stop them."

"Then you'll want to see the *odjus* dance and hear the great *djilia*?"

"I guess so."

"There's not much 'arm in that," Moolo said, more to the old lady than to Madison. "A *gorgio* can 'ardly make sense of it. The only problem is, it takes a bitta preparation, right? You 'ave to

gather all the people, and there's expenses --"

"Money is not a problem."

"Doubtless, no." The gypsy squinted at Madison, sizing him up. "But there's inconvenience involved. You see, we just now did the dance for another *gorgio*; he 'ad an even better introduction than yours. Just like you, he said as how he desperately needed our secrets. It's not that I mind, eh? But two dances in a week -- it tisen't easy."

"Who was this guy?" Madison asked, with unconcealed urgency.

The old lady grasped Moolo's arm with her scrawny fingers. "No dear, I won't tell 'im." Then to Madison: "Swore us to secrecy, 'ee did. We even let 'im take a movin' picture of the dance -- first ever, 'ee said. 'Ee carried it away with 'im over the *bori lon pani*."

Madison decoded that phrase: the great salt ocean. "Where *exactly* did he take this film?"

Once again, the old lady protested silently, and Moolo shook his head. "I reckon I oughtn't to say. I will tell you this: I 'ad 'im followed to see if he was on the up-and-up, or if he 'ad some *hóokamen* up 'is sleeve. 'Ee was an odd bird, I'll say that: 'ad the strangest empty eyes. Still, 'ee got on the right ship and sailed from Southampton a week ago Friday."

"Can you give me some indication of where he sailed?"

"No. I trusted him -- right? -- because 'ee was carryin' those pictures back where they belong, back to the place we call the Navel, where it all began."

Madison searched his memory frantically, and finally asked, "Is this Navel place an island?"

"Perraps." Moolo looked as if he regretted his indiscretion.

"A British possession?" Madison asked.

"I wouldn't know."

"If I said a name, would you tell me if I were right?"

The old lady shook her head, and Moolo joined her.

Madison changed tack. "Could you do your dance for me tonight?"

Moolo squinted and thought, finally muttering, "Aye."

"Then I'll come back about nine, all right? And you'll show me what you showed the other *gorgio*?"

It was agreed. Madison walked back to Tonbridge and made

some calls from an old hotel. Ten days earlier, a ship had left Southampton for a foreign port that could be the "Navel" which Moolo had mentioned. Although Madison was still terribly worried about Marta, this small success cheered him. He might be on her trail, after all. He treated himself to a dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, and then hiked back into the countryside.

It wasn't easy to find his way across the deserted sheep meadow or through the woods, for it was a dark night. After some floundering in the underbrush, he located the gypsies' clearing. The only thing left was a circle of coals where their fire had been.

Madison knew better than to try to catch them. Gypsies could vanish into this most cultivated and civilized of landscapes as completely as Apaches could disappear into the desert. If they'd left a *patteran* behind, it wouldn't be visible to Madison. It struck him that Romanies had wandered this way for centuries, leaving crisscross trails across Europe that only they could read, following imperatives that no *gorgio* could understand. Whatever ritual they had promised to show him, this endless wandering was their true dance. How would their movements look, he wondered, from a point high above Europe? Would the pattern come to mean something from that perspective?

He slogged back to Tonbridge, only to find that he'd missed the last London train. But there was a late bus that meandered through the dark suburbs of Sussex and Surrey until the small hours of the morning. Staring at the yellow streetlights, zebra crossings, and empty roads, Madison could only think disconsolately of Marta.

He knew that sleep would be impossible, so he wandered the streets of London until dawn. The bus had taken him to Victoria Station in the West End, but he walked east into the City as the first weary commuters shuffled out of Underground stations, their eyes trained on the ground; and he quoted to himself: "so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many."

At King's Cross Station, he caught an almost empty train. As it chugged out of town, he watched lights switch on in tenement windows, trucks rumble over iron bridges, and people lumber to the privies at the bottom of their gardens. After an hour's ride, he stood on a grimy road in the manufacturing town of Luton. At a workingman's cafe, he bought egg sandwiches and waited for the

bank to open across the street. With the help of a friendly teller, he sent a telegram to New York and received a money order made out to Madison Brown. He had pasted his own photograph back into his old U.S. passport, and this was enough to obtain the cash.

A taxi took him to the airport at the southeast side of town. He waited with another steaming cup of tea until the offices of BOAC opened. Under the name Wallace Pinkney, he bought a ticket to the Crown Colony of Malta.

His flight was due to leave at noon, stopping first at Gibraltar. Madison waited until almost the last moment, and then presented Pinkney's papers to the immigration officer. The departure gate was just a steel door leading from the bare, hangar-like terminal to the runway.

"You were to go immediately to the American Embassy," said the officious official, a clean-scrubbed young man with very short hair, bluish lips, and prominent ears.

"My plans have changed at short notice. I must fly immediately."

"I'm sorry, sir, but your admission to the United Kingdom was granted *on the proviso* that you would procure a proper passport at the earliest opportunity. We can't have people passing through this country without obeying the law, sir."

All the other passengers had already left the gate. The nearest witness was a man with a mop, nearly fifty yards away. Madison still had two darts for his blowgun. He removed one as the immigration officer began to fill out a form.

"I'll have to send you back to London," he said. "In actual fact, you know, I could call a constable and have you arrested."

The officer slumped faced-down onto the podium, a dart in his forearm. Madison held him in place with a hand on his opposite shoulder. Turning around, he saw that the cleaning man had gone into the toilet. Madison moved the officer to a nearby chair and rifled through his supplies until he found an appropriate form and stamps. He gave himself a "Passage Visa for V.I.P.: Special Circumstances." Then he removed the dart and ran to catch his plane. The propellers were already spinning as he climbed aboard.

In the seat pocket, he found an official brochure about Malta. This contributed a few facts to what he already knew, strengthening his conviction that the island held the solution to

many mysteries.

It was, first of all, the site of the oldest buildings in the world: huge temples, aligned with the sun and stars, that had been erected by an unknown people two thousand years before the pyramids. Once upon a time -- or so the Nazis believed -- mankind had held the secrets of nature. When could this have been, if not before the start of history, during the millions of years when the species was *part* of nature? The original intuitive wisdom of *homo sapiens* was lost when civilization developed and then splintered into a thousand modern cultures. But Malta represented the transition from nature to culture -- the cusp.

In addition to their temples, the original Maltese had left behind obese female figurines, Earth Mothers that were older and much bigger than the Cycladic statuettes in Herr Pitzker's Antiquities Shop. Their goddess had a name, Mara, and a reputation for seducing travelers -- including Odysseus and Saint Paul -- who washed up on the Maltese coast. Moolo had called the island "Navel." If there was someone on the other side of its umbilical cord, Madison guessed that her name was Mara.

The first Maltese had vanished, although Madison suspected (without hard evidence) that they had become the gypsies. In any event, they were replaced in turn by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, and Norsemen, whose languages, faiths, and bloodlines had merged over the centuries to form a strange amalgam. All these conquerors were attracted by Malta's strategic location at the center of the Mediterranean. Surely, though, its location was more than strategic: it symbolized the hidden unity of Africa, Europe, and Asia.

When Malta was still a Viking outpost, Europeans began their crusades into the Holy Land. They occupied Jerusalem and founded a hospital in which pilgrims could rest after their journeys. At first, the men who ran this Hospital of St. John were peaceful monks, but in time they began to escort Christian convoys through Moslem territory. Arming themselves, they became the Knights of St. John, also known as the Hospitalers. In pitched battles and sieges, they made themselves masters of several imposing castles: Beit Jibrin, Magrat, and the notorious Krak des Cavaliers. In the process, they encountered the Assassins, acquired exotic wisdom, and became both rich and powerful. They had a less sinister

reputation than their brother knights, the Templars; but the two groups were strikingly similar.

At its apogee, the Order of St. John controlled priories and castles throughout Europe and the Middle East. But, in time, the Moslems recovered and drove the Knights out of Palestine. They moved to Rhodes, where they specialized in naval warfare; but the Turks ultimately forced them to retreat again. In 1530, the Pope gave them the island of Malta in return for an annual tribute of one falcon. Until Madison read the brochure on the airplane, he had not known the name of the Grand Master who brought his Knights to Malta: Philippe Villiers de l'Isle Adam. The "Isle of Adam," Madison thought, could only mean Malta itself. So the Knights had a specific reason to choose it for their last base.

By now, Madison's plane was droning south over the Bay of Biscay. Not having slept for forty-eight hours, he finally nodded off, and awoke as the aircraft circled Gibraltar's mighty Rock. They stopped for a time at the airport, where Madison was relieved not to be arrested by the British authorities. Then they ascended over the blue Mediterranean.

Madison saw Africa off the right wing of the airplane. Soon after its pale yellow coast receded, Malta appeared on the horizon. The main island was just seventeen miles long, a monolith that rose sharply from the sea on one side and tapered down on the other. As the plane approached, Madison saw that its shoreline was fortified almost from end to end. The Knights had been rich enough to turn it into a vast fortress, which had withstood the galleys and cannons of several Turkish navies. The villages of the interior, with their flat-roofed, limestone houses, looked like piles of yellow cubes, not easily distinguishable from the rocky surface of the island itself.

They landed at an airstrip close to Malta's capital. Grand Master Villiers had named this city after himself, but Malta had worked her usual magic, changing its gender from masculine to feminine. Thus the union of Villiers and Mara had yielded Valletta, the greatest fortress city of the Mediterranean.

Madison took a taxi into town. He found that the streets nearest the harbor were crowded with the usual seaport flotsam: sailors, hawkers, beggars, prostitutes, tourists, and tattoo-artists. It could have been Fisherman's Wharf. But most of Valletta's streets

threaded their way among churches and baroque palaces, each the headquarters of the Hospitalers of a different nation. Although every Knight swore a vow of poverty, the loot that they carried home on their slave-powered galleys had made them rich collectively. Most streets were narrow and stepped, and everywhere Madison saw black shadows, blinding yellow stone, carved reliefs so lush that they seemed to have wilted in the sun, and the hazy sea beyond.

He found a hotel near the harbor and read the shipping news. A tramp steamer, the *Astarte*, was due from Leghorn; Madison knew that it had left Southampton on a Friday twelve days before. He made himself a regular at a café that overlooked its likely docking-place. In that way, he passed the next two days, thinking of Marta, watching the tourists, and reading the newspapers in many languages.

One story caught his eye. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, a physicist at Iowa State College named John Vincent Atanasoff had just been given a grant to build an electronic calculating machine using vacuum tubes. This intrigued Madison, because a year earlier, a Berkeley colleague had shown him an article from the *Proceedings of the London Mathematical Society*. In this article, Alan Turing, a Cambridge mathematician, had advanced an arresting thesis -- one that seemed highly relevant to Madison's work in linguistics. Turing had argued that a machine could be designed to solve any problem within a formal system, such as arithmetic, logic, or geometry. In such systems, axioms are manipulated according to clear rules or algorithms. Designing a machine to apply algorithms was just a matter of clever engineering. For example, a cash-register "knew" how to add and subtract; and the Census Bureau had built complex mechanisms that sorted stacks of punch-cards. So far, each of these machines could only carry out a few routines, over and over again. But Turing argued that a single device could solve problems from *all* formal systems; it just needed to be given different instructions in each case. The same punch-cards that fed it information could also carry such instructions. Instructing a machine would be very complicated, because it would have to be told how to move every gear and switch at every stage in every problem. However, the process of turning English sentences into machine-ready instructions was itself mechanical, so

a machine could accomplish it. Thus it ought to be possible to make a machine that could solve any problem. And now a physicist in Iowa had received a grant to try.

On his third day in Valletta, Madison sent a postcard to Madame Sosostris. It contained a lot of trivial news from an imaginary tourist, Jean-Claude. What he really wanted to her to see was the postmark. If Marta visited the clairvoyante, she would know where to find him.

The Astarte docked on the morning of December 16th. Madison fed the gulls nearby, casually inspecting the men who disembarked. Most were sailors: grizzled Levantines and Filipinos with rolling gaits. But one carried a briefcase and a dufflebag and wore a raincoat tightly buttoned to the collar.

This man was easy to follow, since everyone else in Valletta had dressed for warm, dry weather. Madison watched him enter the Pensione S. Giovanni on the Strada Reale. After a few moments, Madison followed the stranger into the lobby and approached the desk. Tattered posters in green, white, and red announced: "Malta Libera," "Malta Italiana," and "Arrivederci, Inglesi." Madison saw that only one key was missing from the board behind the concierge: room eight. In Italian, he asked politely for room seven. Then he checked out of his old hotel and moved his things into the S. Giovanni.

He suspected that this place rented by the hour. It was dirty and barely furnished, and the shuttered windows overlooked a trash-filled alley. There was a shared w.c. at the end of the hall. Madison sat on his rickety bed and faced a mixture of loneliness and anxiety. He drummed his fingers on his legs and tried to discipline his scattered thoughts.

Half an hour after he'd arrived, he heard a door open nearby. He stuck his head into the hall and saw a man walking away, dressed only in a towel. He made sure that this man had exited room eight, and then fired his last dart.

It lodged in the man's beefy shoulder, but had no other effect. The target turned slowly, plucked it out, and regarded Madison with the vacant eyes of a sleepwalker. Then he loosened his towel and stood naked -- but for the eighteen-inch scimitar than hung from a belt around his waist.

Madison ran into room eight and latched the door. A skinny,

dark-skinned woman pulled sheets around her naked body and screamed. The scimitar sliced into the door, lodging for an instant. Madison scooped up the open dufflebag and threw it out the window. The scimitar chopped a second hole in the door and then pried a great chunk out of it; then a hand reached through, fumbling for the latch. Madison tossed the briefcase after the dufflebag. Just as the door opened, he leapt.

It wasn't far to the ground. He collected the bags and ran down the alley toward bright light. He stopped running when he reached a low wall, which made the lane a cul-de sac. He peered over and saw a canal, perpendicular to his alley and twenty feet lower. Its water was stagnant and oily; trash and dead fish had piled up in corners. A salty, putrid smell stung the back of Madison's nose. Parked across the way were classic Maltese boats called Luzzu: small wooden vessels with high bows that had been painted in bold patterns of blue, red, and yellow. The evil eye appeared prominently on each bow. The boats were tied to piles; doors led directly from the canal into stone houses on either side.

Madison looked behind him and saw a man in a white robe and red belt lowering himself from the window of room seven. Madison threw the briefcase into a Luzzu. It landed on target, causing the boat to rock violently. He tossed the dufflebag next, but missed, so that it half sank into the canal. Then he climbed onto the wall just as the robed man approached, swinging his scimitar like a scythe.

Madison jumped feet-first, landing in thick muck at the bottom of the water. Completely submerged, he struggled in panic to free himself. When he reached the surface, he saw that he was still a few yards away from the Luzzu. He swam the distance and clambered aboard, nearly capsizing the boat. There was no oar or pole in sight. Madison loosened the vessel and began to move it down the canal by holding onto piles and parked boats. He looked back just in time to see the robed man preparing to throw a dagger. It flew as straight as an arrow, lodging in the briefcase that Madison had raised as a shield to protect his face. The Luzzu shuddered on impact.

Madison recognized the dagger: an identical one had killed their guide, Tariq, in the Valley of the Assassins. This Assassin -- if that's what he was -- now plunged into the canal, making an

enormous splash as his billowing cloak hit the surface. Madison fished the sopping dufflebag out of the water and propelled the boat as fast as he could toward Valletta's harbor, which was visible in the distance.

There was no sign of the Assassin. He must have drowned, Madison thought, beginning to relax. The Luzzu was still moving slowly from his last push, but there was nothing to grab onto in this section of the canal.

Madison tried standing up and rocking the boat forward. His trousers were drenched and oily; they clung to his legs. But he felt something particularly tight on his right ankle. He looked down and gasped. A hand had reached out of the water to grab him.

Another hand seized the gunwale, and the Assassin's head emerged from the canal. He opened his vacant, dilated eyes and looked up at Madison. By now, the Luzzu had drifted within reach of another boat, which looked something like a Venetian gondola. Madison flung both bags onto this second vessel and then tipped into the canal, capsizing the Luzzu. The Assassin lost his grip on Madison's slippery trousers. Madison swam with wild strokes toward the harbor. Hearing nothing behind him, he stopped at a pile and looked back. The Assassin, he saw, was paddling in the canal, looking for the bags. He had not yet spotted them aboard the gondola.

Madison swam to a wooden launch with an outboard motor. He climbed aboard, revved it up, and roared directly toward the Assassin, who swam behind a pile for cover. Madison cut the engine and grabbed the gondola's prow. The two boats swung and rocked from the impact, and Madison nearly fell overboard. But he managed to grab the bags, pull them onto the powerboat, and zoom into the harbor.

The contrast between the dark canal and the dazzling, thronged dock startled him. He had emerged under a footbridge of the Strada Reale, across which sailors and tourists strolled by the score. He fell in with the crowd, walking quickly toward the main ferry docks. A boat was boarding for Gozo, Malta's second island. He bought a ticket and ran up the gangway just as the attendant began to close the gate.

The ferry was a simple vessel, open at the sides, with a tarpaulin cover for shade. Madison sat on a wooden bench next to

some Italian schoolchildren who absorbed themselves by throwing rocks at gulls. After a while, however, they begin to giggle and gossip about Madison, who smelled strongly of dead fish. He moved away, finding a breezy spot near the aft.

He looked through the Assassin's briefcase. Inside was a boat ticket, the return half of a voyage from Jaffa to Southampton and back, via Gibraltar, Palma, Leghorn, and Malta. It seemed that the Assassin was supposed to begin and end his voyage in Palestine. Could Malta be just a random stopping point? That would explain why he had spent his time with a prostitute instead of immediately delivering his package.

A passport identified him as Sunir Ibrahim, subject of the British Empire and resident of His Majesty's Mandate for Palestine. Stamps showed that he had entered Germany several times in recent months; he had also travelled to Persia, Italy, and England. A letter introduced him as an employee of Mohammed Said Haj Amin el-Husseini, the Mufti -- or chief Islamic cleric -- in Jerusalem.

The dufflebag contained ordinary, European-style clothes and one roll of film for a movie projector. Madison noticed that there was no Koran or prayer rug, which made him wonder whether Mr. Ibrahim could really serve the Mufti.

The ferry chugged along Malta's fortified shore toward Gozo, where, Madison knew, some of the earliest temples in the world still stood, open to the stars. He was torn between Malta and Jerusalem. The former had struck him as promising, pregnant with the occult. But he didn't really know what to do on the island, and a trained killer was after him there. To make matters worse, the Maltese authorities might soon want to arrest him for burglary.

In the City of David, however, Madison could pursue several leads. First, the Mufti appeared to be working with the Nazis, unless he had formed his own Lodge of Assassins. This seemed worth investigating, although Madison doubted that it would lead him all the way to Marta.

More important, Madison believed that he would find the Nazis at work on occult projects in Palestine. He recalled the postcard from Rabbi Halberstam that had told him to send the Jewish manuscript from Slovakia to Jerusalem. St.-Germain's men had somehow appropriated the scroll as soon as it arrived, leaving the poor rabbi cruelly murdered. Until now, Madison had assumed

that the Nazis had tortured Rabbi Halberstam until he divulged the Jerusalem address to which the manuscript had been sent. But now he realized that another scenario was far more plausible. Surely St.-Germain had interrogated Halberstam immediately after Madison and Marta had left the rabbi's house. In that case, the Nazis had *chosen* Jerusalem as the scroll's destination, and St.-Germain had written the postcard himself. The address on the card must be a Nazi hideout; maybe it was the world headquarters of Operation Arcana. If only Madison could remember it exactly.

In Gozo's small harbor, he talked to sailors and loiterers until he was introduced to Mehemet, the skipper of a xebec that plied the Eastern Mediterranean. Madison negotiated a journey to Palestine, explaining that he wanted to be let ashore in secret. Mehemet was unwilling to make the voyage with just one passenger, no matter how well Madison promised to pay; but by dusk he had also arranged to carry three Catholic nuns, a Jewish refugee family, and several crates of American cigarettes. His three-masted boat with its quaint overhanging ends sailed after dark, when the customs house was closed.