

IV

Marta and Madison watched Europe approach from the bow of the Istanbul ferry. Behind them was Üsküdar, a suburb on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Ahead, the city arose from its grey waters: a rolling peninsula, ringed with ancient sea walls, jammed with crooked houses, and studded with broad domes and lofty minarets. As the ferry turned into the bustling Golden Horn, Madison murmured, "And therefore I have sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium."

"You mean, you took the ferry to Istanbul." Although Marta knew the city well, it made her uneasy and irritable. Armenians have bad memories of Constantinople.

They disembarked in the quarter of the fish markets, shocked by the noisy crowds. Marta shouted: "We'll go first to this hotel of yours; see if they'll really take us without passports."

Madison had a favorite place to stay in Istanbul, a small establishment below the Blue Mosque. They walked there, ascending the Greek acropolis through narrow streets. The upper stories of the half-timbered houses overhung the unpaved roads, and chimneys stuck out of walls like corncob pipes. Every street curved; most only ran for a block or so. It was as if the roads were just the crooked spaces left over when thousands of rickety buildings were set down in clumps between the Byzantine walls.

They knocked on a polished wooden door and a young woman admitted them to a cozy lobby, furnished with carpets, oil lamps, and low seats that ran along every wall. The proprietor emerged and greeted Madison warmly in Turkish: "My old friend, Dr. Brown, the crazy American professor! You have been away too long."

"Evilya," said Madison, "how's business? Can you give us two rooms -- and wait until Thursday for our money and passports? I'm in one of my usual scrapes."

Evilya winked. "I could wait a month of Thursdays. Come, you shall both have balcony rooms overlooking the water. Lunch is served at one."

Madison's room was furnished in the Ottoman style, with lacquered furniture and rugs. He opened heavy shutters to reveal sky, water, and sea gulls. Stepping onto the balcony, he inhaled the

sea air. Below were a few winding streets, ruined walls, and then the Sea of Marmara, dotted with freighters and pleasure boats.

"So, you like this place?" Marta spoke from the adjacent balcony, where she was smoking a cigarette, one foot propped flat against the wall. She wore khaki slacks and a simple black blouse.

"I love it," said Madison. "Even you must think it's nice, after twenty hours in that Syrian freight car."

"I admit, I'm looking forward to a comfortable night. But I don't want to stay here forever, so let's make a plan."

"All right." Madison moved to his balcony's edge, an arm's length from Marta. "What are we going to do?"

"We can get passports for cash in the Kapali Çarşı," she said, referring to the main bazaar. "I could draw funds from a Turkish Communist Party shadow account, but as soon as we received the money, they'd trace us here. So I'd prefer to use that as a last resort."

"I could have cash wired here from my U.S. bank."

"No, the NKVD will be watching it. They'll also keep their eyes on your family's accounts. The best thing would be to borrow some money from an old friend -- someone you don't see very often. Is there anyone like that?"

"Sure. One of the Harvard gang would wire me a few thousand."

"Of course: a little pocket change for an old school chum. Well, we'll accept it. Also, please give me that fake Soviet passport. I'll need the photo."

Before lunch, Madison asked Evilya to send a telegraph to his old squash partner, Ned Brewster, now of the Morgan Bank in New York. Then Madison and Marta ate kebabs in the quiet dining room of the hotel and talked about their next steps. In the lounge, a skinny white American kid played St. Louis jazz on an upright piano, practicing for the evening.

Evilya approached with a telegraph on a brass plate. Madison took it and read:

*MADISON YOU OLD CROOK STOP WOULD HELP YOU
ANYTIME BUT NEWS REPORTS MAKE CASH TRANSFER
TOO RISKY STOP ADVISE YOU CONSULT US CONSUL
IMMEDIATELY STOP BEST NED*

"What do you make of this?" said Madison, showing it to Marta.

She asked Evilya, "Do you get any American papers here?" He nodded and returned with a week's worth of *The New York Tribune*. Madison and Marta thumbed through the papers as they sipped tea from slender glasses. Then she handed him Monday's edition with her finger on an inside page. He read:

EXPLORER TURNS RED?

California Prof Linked to Notorious Spy

By our correspondent

Moscow, September 19 -- The noted explorer, linguist, and lecturer Dr. Madison Brown has entered the Soviet Union under a Communist passport. He was photographed in the company of a notorious Red agitator, Captain Marta Khatchaturian of the Russian secret police.

Dr. Brown is well known for his travels to exotic regions, recently described in the *National Geographic* magazine. He was the first white man to reach the source of the Içana River in darkest Brazil. Dr. Brown is also believed to have radical sympathies. He has contributed funds to known subversive organizations, such as the Congress on Racial Equality.

Dr. Brown has taken a two-year leave from the University of California, officially to conduct linguistic expeditions in northwestern China and Mongolia. Since this area is infested with communist Chinese, he was advised to postpone his travels, but he proceeded regardless.

Tongues of Fire, p. 55

Captain Khatchaturian is sought by the Italian, Japanese, Nationalist Chinese, and Hungarian authorities. She is a known agitator with a long record of subversive activities. She was expelled from Great Britain in 1932 for recruiting communist agents in the civil service. She is believed to have left Britain for Spain, where she commanded a company of the International Brigade.

American consular officials refused comment on the Brown incident, but diplomatic sources indicate that the photographs and documents are genuine. Dr. Brown is sought for questioning.

"So, here we are," said Madison, examining a grainy photograph of himself and Marta on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. "Who do you think is responsible for this?"

"Right away, I guessed the NKVD. The photo confirms it."

"How's that?" Madison studied it.

Marta pointed impatiently. "This is Starobin, but someone else's face has been pasted over him. They're trying to preserve his cover."

"The point is to turn the U.S. authorities against me?"

"Correct."

"So what should we do?"

Marta waited while Evilya's daughter cleared their plates. Once they were alone, she said, "I'll get some money. Meanwhile, do you think you can continue your research here in Istanbul? Was there anything about this city in the Nazi files you read?"

"A bit."

"Give it a try. I'll meet you here around dinner time. Look first at the apothecary shop across the street. If the ceramic pot at the left end of the window display has been turned so that the lettering faces south, don't enter the hotel. Instead, go immediately to the Hagia Sophia; we'll meet in the south gallery. Understand?"

Madison hadn't even noticed a shop outside, let alone a

ceramic pot. But he agreed, and they parted.

His first stop was the great central bazaar, a covered market far larger than the one in Qavzin. He found a narrow bookshop that was piled high with dusty volumes. An old man with a long face, bright eyes, and a wispy beard sat behind the counter -- looking just like an El Greco saint. He did not recognize his customer immediately, so Madison addressed him in English: "Demetrios, how are things?"

The old man peered up from a vellum-bound book. He spoke in a very soft voice: "Professor, it is good to see you. Last time, you carted off my whole Sufism stock. I have more now, plus some Byzantine thaumaturgy, Ismaili mysticism, Tibetan books of the dead. What are you looking for these days?"

"I don't know, I'll have a good browse," said Madison, examining a nearby shelf. "Where's your kabbalah?"

"That's in my back room." Demetrios led Madison into a grimy area behind the counter. He lit an oil lamp and waved his bony hand at stacks of Hebrew volumes. Madison got on his hands and knees and began to browse. Right away, he spotted a book printed in Ladino, a hybrid of Spanish and Hebrew that was spoken by some of the Jews who fled to Turkey in 1492, when Ferdinand and Isabella expelled them from Spain.

He said, "I guess there are some Ladino speakers here in Constantinople who still keep the kabbalah alive." He called Istanbul by its ancient name in deference to Demetrios' Greek heritage.

From the other room, the bookseller replied: "I think you're right. You know, Shabbetai Zevi, the false Jewish messiah, came here in the seventeenth century and created quite a stir. Those Ladinos have a special fondness for esoterica and apocalyptic thought."

"I'm not surprised," said Madison. "After all, kabbalah flourished in Spain during the middle ages, so these Jews are the heirs of that tradition." He thumbed through an old Hebrew book with missing covers and said, "I'd like to talk to a Ladino-speaking rabbi about mysticism. Do you know where I ought to go?"

Demetrios thought for a minute. "Even before the days of Constantine, the Jews of this city lived mostly up the Golden Horn, near where Heraclius later built his wall. They're still there,

especially the Ladinos. Most rabbis are pretty closed-mouthed about kabbalah, but I recommend that you go to Temple Zion and see Rabbi Moses Mendes. I'm sure he'll enjoy chatting with you, although he'll keep his own counsel."

Madison thanked Demetrios and bought a paperback Ladino lexicon that he could afford with his meager funds. He left the film from Alamut to be developed at a nearby camera store, and set off in search of Temple Zion.

His route took him over several of Istanbul's seven hills, through crowded street markets, down deserted roads where tethered goats munched on trash, past an eighteenth-century mosque with an elegant courtyard, and finally into a wretched neighborhood in the city's old northwest. Here he saw a few bearded men with yarmulkes and side-locks walking among the Turks and Bulgarians of the quarter. He asked one, in Hebrew, for Temple Zion, which turned out to be an undistinguished storefront building near the city walls. Madison knocked on the blank door and waited until a skinny little man opened it and limped inside. As Madison's eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw that he had entered a surprisingly large space. Rows of pews faced an elaborate Ark. The floor was buried under layers of Turkish carpets, and intricate iron lamps hung everywhere.

"Are you Rabbi Mendes?" Madison asked, in Ladino. He had never studied the language, but it was easy to put together a rudimentary sentence in what was essentially a Spanish dialect; and he expected to be able to understand the reply.

The little man shook his head and limped away. A few minutes later, someone else approached -- an old man in a white shawl, white beard, and embroidered white yarmulke.

Madison presented his hand and spoke again in Ladino, "Rabbi, my name is Madison Brown. I am an American professor."

The rabbi examined his face carefully. "Welcome to the synagogue," he said, in heavily accented English. "How can I assist you?"

"If it's not inconvenient, I'd like to discuss some of the traditions of your community."

The rabbi gave an ironic smile. "Yes, I know we are a curiosity. Come, let us sit in my study."

They crossed a dark hall, climbed a winding staircase, and

entered a book-lined room. Madison saw a framed photograph of Jerusalem on the wall. He sat across a cluttered desk from the rabbi, who began: "You speak a little Ladino. How is that?"

"As I said, I'm very interested in your community."

"Are you Jewish?"

Madison shook his head.

"I didn't think so," said the rabbi.

To break the silence that ensued, Madison said, "But I'm fascinated by Jewish mysticism."

"Ah, kabbalah and all that," said the rabbi; "It interests many gentiles." Again, he showed his ironic smile.

"Are *you* a believer?" Madison asked.

"I dabble." The rabbi pulled a heavy book from a nearby shelf and opened a yellow-stained page. Madison saw a woodcut print that depicted ten Hebrew words radiating like fireworks from a central sun. A leafless tree was portrayed in the background, and the words could equally well be interpreted as its fruits.

"You are familiar with this?" Rabbi Mendes asked.

Madison believed that such charts were the most superficial aspect of kabbalah, so the rabbi was probably trying to divert him from its essence. Madison pointed to some of the Hebrew words: "Those are the *sefirot*, the attributes of God. Here's *gedullah*, Greatness; here's *binah*, Intelligence, and so on. They correlate with the ten numbers, which can, in turn, express all the letters of the Torah. They also symbolize the parts of the human body, the known names of God, the heroes of the Bible, the metaphysical elements, and so on. You can draw paths among them, connect them in all sorts of ways, and contemplate the shapes and words that result."

"So you understand kabbalah," said Rabbi Mendes, his tone suggesting that the subject was closed.

"Somewhat," said Madison, "but I don't know how to *use* this chart."

"You hope to work magic with it, perhaps?"

Trying to surprise the rabbi, Madison asked, "Do you disdain people who use the *sefirot* for magic?"

"That is not the path to spiritual illumination."

"All right, then, let me ask you a metaphysical question. Why does the Lord, who is one and indivisible, have all these

distinct attributes?"

Rabbi Mendes leaned back in his chair and said, "The Lord is perfectly good, but he wants his people to overcome evil so that we can *earn* redemption on earth. The Lord's perfection is such that His very appearance would wipe out evil -- and annihilate us, too. So He appears to His creation in the form of His separate elements or aspects. In truth, He is one, indivisible, unchanging; but we experience Him variously as Justice, Compassion, Wisdom, and so forth. If we experienced the Lord as He really is, as the *ein soph*, then we would not survive the encounter. Therefore, if we want to understand Him, the best we can do is to meditate on the manifold combinations of the *sefirot*, which hint at a primordial divine unity."

Madison had heard enough to know that the rabbi was reasonably learned in kabbalah; now he wanted to reveal his own knowledge. He said, "Do you think that the Israelites could stand to hear the Lord's word, even the ten commandments? Or is the real Law too good, too perfect to be received by mortal men?"

The rabbi looked uncomfortable. "Of course, the ten commandments are authentic parts of the Law," he said.

"But how could Moses, standing up there on Sinai, withstand the direct word of the primordial godhead, the *ein soph*? I'll tell you what I think. I think that all Moses heard was the first *aleph* of the first commandment, 'I am your God.' In Hebrew, the consonant *aleph* has no real sound; it is just the shaping of the mouth to express a vowel. So what Moses received was not words, but Word with a capital 'w' -- just the *idea* of God's speech. When he came down the mountain, Moses gave his people the commandments and wrote the whole Torah for them. But it was all interpretation, exegesis. The original text was just that divine open mouth, the *aleph*. That's what we strive to recover when we study Torah using kabbalah."

"Where did you get these ideas?" asked Rabbi Mendes. He now looked at Madison in an entirely different way.

"Let me be frank. I'm here on business, not just to chat about theology. I'm a professional linguist; that's why I know a little Ladino. I was minding my own business in Mongolia when some Soviet agents nabbed me. They wanted me to figure out what the Nazis are up to. It seems that Hitler's very interested in the occult,

including kabbalah. I don't know how closely you've followed the recent events in Germany" -- here the rabbi looked pained -- "but you must understand that the Nazis really have it in for the Jews. It's obvious, too, that Germany will dominate at least some of her neighbors, and once Hitler had built his Third Reich, all European Jewry will be at his mercy. I'm not sure why these Nazis are so anti-Semitic, but I do know that they believe in 'practical kabbalah,' as the rabbis used to call it. That is, they believe that you can exploit Jewish mysticism for magical purposes. They fear that the Jews will use kabbalah against them if they don't get it first. So they want to collect all the most important, most secret texts, especially those pertaining to demonology and the golem. My mission is to locate those texts and warn their owners to ship them overseas immediately. The problem is, I don't know what or where the important stuff is. I need your help."

Rabbi Mendes examined Madison's face. After a long time, he said, "I suppose you will tell the rabbis to send their manuscripts to your masters in Moscow?"

"Not at all. They can send them anywhere, and they don't even have to tell me where. I don't work for the Communists now, and I don't want to collect kabbalah. I just want to save some documents from the Nazis."

"Because you think that they have magic properties?"

Now Madison had to pause to think. "No, I'm basically a skeptic. I want to save those documents because the Nazis have no right to them. Also, they're historically interesting."

"But gentile scholars must never see them, because they are esoteric Jewish texts."

"Fine. That's up to their rightful owners."

For a long time, the rabbi stared into space. Meanwhile, Madison watched his face and idly scanned his dusty library. Finally, Rabbi Mendes said, "I do not, myself, have the information you seek. But if you come with me, we will visit someone who may."

They left the synagogue by the front entrance and walked through the neighborhood. As they went, the rabbi said, "I'm taking you to meet a man named Nathan. He's sort of a sad case, I'm afraid. He's an old hasid, and they say that he used to be a *ba'al shem*, one who knows the true name of God. Some believe that the

whole Torah is God's real name, scrambled because of human evil, and a *ba'al shem* knows how to unscramble it. In any case, Nathan used to meditate on the true name, reaching a state that we call *devekut*. In other words, he thought only and always of God, even when speaking to other people, so that his soul achieved immortality here on earth. This is a very holy state, but a dangerous one, too. Something went wrong. Perhaps he showed some pride or covetousness, and he was punished."

"How so?"

"You'll see."

They walked down dusty alleys until they reached a house that was practically ruined. Its upper story was rubble, its windows lacked glass, and garbage had been piled against the wall. Next to the battered door was a mazuzah, the encased parchment scroll that hangs outside the threshold of every Orthodox house. Madison read the one word that always shows through the hole in the case: *shaddai*, "Almighty" -- an attribute of God. Meanwhile, Rabbi Mendes knocked and waited. At last, a terribly thin man of uncertain age appeared. He wore a black hat and sidelocks over his emaciated features, and his face carried a smile that was either beatific or idiotic. He shook and bobbed his head constantly.

"Nathan," said the rabbi, in Hebrew, "I want you to meet a friend."

"Un amicus di yours," Nathan said, smiling and bowing, "est mio freund aussi. Die chambre è m□kra et povera, aber, por favor, entrate. Efendi, sederci bitte."

Madison was struck that Nathan pronounced each word in its own, perfectly appropriate accent. A one-man Babel, he twitched and shook from the exertion of speaking.

Madison and Rabbi Mendes stepped into the dank chamber and found places to sit on stones and broken wooden boxes. Nathan had a cot, some books, and a pile of rags, but little else. There was a very strong smell of mold in the house.

"Dr. Brown," said the rabbi, "why don't you tell Nathan your whole story? Speak English if you like; he understands any language as well as the next."

So Madison described everything that had happened to him since Mongolia. Nathan grinned and bobbed the whole time. When the story was done, Madison added: "Now I need to know what

secret books must be saved from the Nazis. Can you tell me where I should go, and whom I should visit?"

"Es-tu uomo theow?" asked Nathan, with evident difficulty.

"Am I a man of God? Well, I'm not a cleric, and I'm not a Jew, unfortunately. But I am a Quaker."

Nathan's face lit up. "Hasidim christianorum!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, we are sort of like the hasidim of Christianity. Few rules, no hierarchy, lots of love for God and man."

Nathan put his face close to Madison's, tipping it to one side. "Dicami," he said, "ton logon di Shabbetai Zevi."

"Tell you the word of Shabbetai Zevi?" Madison thought quickly. If Nathan liked him for being a Quaker, then perhaps he was a man who despised all written laws and doctrines -- an antinomian. Perhaps his idea of religion was pure ecstasy: unrestricted love of God. In that case, he might admire the most notorious saying of the false Messiah. Hesitantly, Madison said, "Blessed be he who allows the forbidden." It crossed his mind as he spoke that this phrase resembled the alleged blasphemy of Hassan-i-Sabbah: "Nothing is true and everything is permitted."

The Rabbi looked appalled at Madison's words, but Nathan was thunderstruck. He leapt backwards and danced around, hooting. He even ran in a little circle, and then stuck his face right in front of Madison's.

"Yo *knew* das su arriverais."

"You knew that I would come?"

"Da, da!" Nathan fell on his knees, gesticulating earnestly.

"Can you help me, then?"

"Sicher. Les biblioi hermetici di kabbalah --"

-- the secret books of kabbalah," Madison translated, --

-- sont wie une cadena."

-- are like a chain?"

"Right! Tu dois habban Alles, ciascuno."

"You have to have them all, every one. I guess if a link is missing, there's no magic."

"Evet! Le travail para P□ ist, unum salvar. One jüddischen texte."

"I just have to save one Jewish book from the Nazis. Which one?"

“Visitez Rabbi Halberstam, vicino to Praha. Dicas che Natan van Pu□awi you ha detto, das anangke est sauver *Ma’yenot ha-Hakhmah* von Mordecai Buzaglo.”

“I must see a Rabbi Halberstam in Prague. I must say that Nathan from Pu□awi told me that it is necessary to save a book called the *Ma’yenot ha-Hakhmah*, written by Mordecai Buzaglo, from Hitler.”

“Sic! The mullah mandar es muß, in Erez Yisroel.”

“The rabbi should send it to Palestine.”

“Précis. Nunc, schnell, schnell!” Nathan practically pushed Madison out of his house, so eager was he for the American to get going. As Rabbi Mendes and Madison walked away, Nathan pranced in the street and sang gibberish.

Madison was eager to tell Marta what he had learned. He rushed to the great bazaar to collect his developed film and prints, and then ran to his hotel without remembering to check the apothecary shop across the street. Hearing jazz from the lounge, he wandered in. Under the lazy ceiling fans, about two dozen people, mostly European men, sat smoking and chatting. The piano player pounded out Count Basie’s *One O’Clock Jump*. Madison peered through thick smoke until he saw a familiar shock of unmanageable black hair.

He approached Marta, threading his way past round marble tables. She sat alone with a tall blond man. They were drinking spirits, their elbows close together on the tablecloth. Marta wore a bias-cut black silk gown with a low back, wide shoulder straps, and a small train. Her companion, a middle-aged man with chiselled features, smoked a cigar. Madison moved into Marta’s line-of-sight. She gave him an angry look with her huge black eyes, so he retreated. At the desk, he asked for his key and went to his room to examine the prints.

At seven, he went downstairs to order food and check on Marta; but she had left the lounge. He brought his dinner to his room and continued to study the photographs. At nine, he knocked on her door. Hearing nothing, he went to the bar and ordered whisky; but since Marta was nowhere in sight, he took his drink away with him. It was nearly midnight before he heard a light rap of knuckles outside. He was on his hands and knees studying his pictures, which were spread in rows on the rug. “Come in,” he

shouted.

Marta stepped inside and removed a shawl. Underneath, she still wore the silk dress that he had seen earlier.

"Hello," said Madison, pretending not to look at her.

"Good evening, Madison. What have you got there?"

He could feel her looking over his shoulder. He answered, "'The abstract joy, / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images.'"

"Pardon me?"

"Our prints from Alamut."

She bent over to examine them: row after row of spindly hieroglyphs, two dozen on each photograph. "What do they say?" she asked.

"I wish I knew. Do you see any two alike?"

She studied the prints for some time. Meanwhile, Madison felt a familiar sense of dread and sorrow at the thought of her with the blond man. He managed a conversational tone as he said: "I can't find any duplicates. You can usually decode an unknown writing system by identifying regularities. You guess what language it represents, and then assume that the common signs stand for common words."

"I don't see any duplicate signs."

"Me neither. Maybe each shape is a sentence, and the component lines are the words -- something like that. I'll figure it out."

"Did you learn anything else today?"

"A few things. How about you? Where have you been?" He lifted his head and saw her bent over the pictures. She gave a crooked smile and straightened up.

"I had a successful day."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah." She opened her pocket book and dropped a wad of currency on the floor. Madison saw that it was an ample stack of British pounds.

"Where did you get that?"

"I expropriated the expropriators."

He clambered to his feet and asked, "Who did you steal it from?"

"If you're going to be cross about it, I don't have to tell you."

He shrugged. "How about passports?" he asked.

"I have those, too. But we'll have to work out a clever cover story to explain what a South African major and a Turkish lady are doing together in Europe."

She removed a very large, elaborately embossed passport from her purse. Right away, Madison recognized the British Imperial regalia on the cover. She tossed it to him; he opened it and found his face pasted inside. "Thomas Garrison Peabody," he read, "Major, Royal South African Fusilliers. That's me, eh?"

He noticed that she had been grinning almost constantly since she entered the room. She positively glowed. "That's right, Tom," she said. "You were born on January 18, 1894 in Portsmouth, England, and emigrated to Cape Town after serving on the Western Front in the Great War. You own a cotton farm in the Cape province and a stake in the De Beers diamond mining business."

"How do you know all this?" Madison asked, slipping the passport into his jacket pocket.

"The real Tom told me."

"Was that the man you were with early this evening?"

"It was."

"And you took his passport?"

"I did."

"Won't he call the police?"

"He won't call anybody. I gave him the scare of his life and he'll never breathe a word about this evening. Poor chap."

"Where did you get your passport and all that money?"

"Questions, questions. You won't like the answers. So let's have some drinks sent up, and you can tell me about your day."

A few minutes later, they stood on Madison's balcony, drinking white wine. A lamp in his room shed a dim light as far as the railing, but beyond that all was dark except for the lights of some far-away ships. Madison recounted his conversations with the rabbi and Nathan. Then he and Marta discussed their upcoming journey to Prague, considering routes and cover stories.

A few stars twinkled above, and a sickle moon hovered over Asia. Marta said, "You realize that the Nazis would like to kill us both because we've seen Alamut. The Soviets would love to torture and execute us. Even the Americans, who have no power to speak of, think that you're a communist spy. And before all this started, four or five Western countries were already after me. So how does

it make you feel -- to be all alone in the world? You could still go to the American consulate and clear everything up over a glass of sherry."

She leaned on the balcony and watched the moonlit sea. There was salt in the air, and the faint sound of sea gulls. Madison overcame a shudder and said, "Alone in all the world with you? That sounds pretty good."

She turned and looked at his chest. She grasped his lapel and rubbed it gently between two fingers, while he watched her wild profusion of hair from above. He ran his fingers through her curls. Then he put his hand gently on her chin, lifted her face, and kissed her. Her lips yielded, her arms encircled his neck, and her ardent tongue met his. They held the kiss so long that it hurt.

Finally, she turned and faced the sea, her back to him. He held the railing on either side of her, so that both arms touched hers lightly. A warm, salty breeze blew from the Marmara. He kissed her soft neck. She backed closer, so that her bottom touched him. When she did not move away, they both knew that their habitual sheaths of modesty had been lifted. Madison ran his hands firmly down her neck, her shoulders, her back, and gathered up some of her long gown. Then he slid the whole garment up and off her body. She turned, her arms covering her chest, and whispered, "Switch off the light."

When he returned, she stood by the railing, her hip cocked slightly to the left. Her body was ivory white, a smooth Gothic "S" but for the shock of black beneath her navel.

"Can you see me?" she whispered.

"Yes," he said, although her form merged with the clouds and waves behind.

"I can't see *you*."

Still a few feet away from her, he bent over to remove his shoes and socks, then straightened up, took off his jacket, and unbuttoned his shirt. Finally, he turned toward the French windows, unbuckled his belt and slipped his trousers and shorts to the floor.

"Turn around," she said.

He faced her, bare to the world, his hands at his sides.

"Come here."

He approached, and soon they were kissing again,

enveloped in each other's arms, their cool skin touching. But suddenly Marta pushed him away. She grabbed his clothes and threw them over the railing.

He was too stunned to speak. "What are you --?"

She clutched her own dress and purse in one hand and pulled Madison's shoulder with the other. Her motion was so rough that he thought she was going to kill him. As she yanked him toward the railing, the door to his room flew open. Several men were silhouetted against the electric light in the hall, their long shadows stretching across his bed. They held submachine guns.

"Jump!" cried Marta, leaping stark naked over the railing.

Madison hesitated, and then the bark of automatic weapons made him vault after her. He fell for what seemed like a very long time, finally landing with a crash on a tiled roof. His clothes were strewn all around him, and his knee bled badly.

"Come," whispered Marta, who had pulled her dress down as far as her navel. "It's a three-meter drop to the ground, then we'll go over the little wall on the left."

They heard loud voices above. Madison looked up and saw a man leaning over the railing, trying to peer into the darkness below. Madison scooped up most of his clothes and tossed them toward the ground. He lowered himself off the roof and dropped onto a surface of dry mud. He backed against the hotel wall and pulled on his trousers and jacket. His shoes and shirt had vanished. In his pockets were the new passport and the film from Alamut.

Marta said, "Let's run for it." They sprinted across a small yard and scrambled over a low brick wall. Just as Madison dropped onto the other side, machine-gun fire raked the area. He and Marta scampered barefoot down a pitch-dark alley. Voices bellowed behind them, and someone started a car engine. Headlights illuminated the main street and then turned slowly into the alley. Marta and Madison managed to duck behind a stone cistern as everything around them became either starkly white or pitch black. The car's engine ran noisily, and they heard footsteps on gravel.

From her purse, Marta removed the glittering dagger of Alamut. "Climb the wall behind us," she whispered to Madison.

Two men approached, one a Turkish policeman, the other a European civilian. They walked very cautiously, training their rifles into every corner. Meanwhile, Madison scrambled the soft stone

wall, built in ancient times of great rugged blocks. He tensed, expecting to be shot from behind, but a brick salient shielded him. Reaching the top, he peered over and saw the placid, moon-lit Marmara, a strip of sand, a few wooden piers, and a narrow road. Fifty yards to his left, the wall had been broken to make room for a modern set of stairs.

The two policemen were now approaching the cistern where Madison had left Marta. He scooped some gravel off the top of the wall and flung it onto the tiled roof opposite. The officers spun around and squinted in that direction. Marta materialized on the wall, having taken a different path to the top.

"What do you think?" she asked.

Madison said, "If we can manage to crawl along here for fifty meters, we'll be OK."

They scrambled along the narrow crest with the dark city on one side and the sea on the other. The wall was jagged and treacherous, so whenever they could, they ran over rooftops instead, their bare feet padding on the clay tiles. At last they reached the stairs and dashed toward the sea.

"Can you sail?" Marta asked, breathless.

It took a moment for Madison to make sense of her question. He answered, "Yes, quite well."

"Then let's commandeer that boat."

A single-masted sloop lay at anchor fifty feet from the shore. Marta pulled her dress high enough to free her legs for swimming and waded into the Marmara. Madison abandoned his Persian jacket and followed her, starting to swim when the water reached his waist. The negatives would survive salt water, he decided, and so should his passport. They arrived at the boat and clung to its anchor chain. When she was ready, Marta climbed aboard, clutching her knife in her teeth. Madison chuckled, for he guessed that she was imitating Eroll Flynn.

There was a small cabin below deck. Marta clambered into the cockpit and kicked the cabin door open, her knife in one hand. She emerged seconds later, having found nothing inside but empty bunks and a crude galley.

Madison said, "Who were those guys with the guns?"

As Marta replaced the knife in her pocketbook, she said, "The police. My South African friend must have gone to them, after

all. I thought I'd scared him into silence, but apparently I made a mess of things."

Madison was not entirely sorry to see this evidence of Marta's fallibility. Showing off his own skills, he used a windlass to raise the anchor; he unfurled the sails; and soon they were underway. Since Marta could not find charts in the cabin, they navigated by watching the sparse lights on land and squinting to see the shore when it was dark. Madison held the wheel and gave Marta occasional instructions on handling the rigging. In order to minimize their chances of running aground, he dropped anchor in a cove ten miles from Istanbul, where they took turns napping until dawn. In the morning, they sailed due south, steering by the sun, until they had reached the far shore of the sparkling Marmara; then they hugged the coastline and cruised toward the Mediterranean. It was a clear, warm, autumn day, and the sea was dotted with small craft like their own. A deep channel, marked by buoys, carried a procession of dingy Russian, Bulgarian, and Greek freighters. In places, the straits of the Hellespont were only a kilometer wide, but Madison steered through without incident.

Marta had ripped the bottom two feet of fabric off her gown, which now looked less like a fashionable party dress than a timeless Grecian stole. The combination of sea, sun, bare legs, and plain cloth struck Madison as elemental. In turn, Marta examined him with squinting eyes. "You know," she said, "if you still had your pipe and that ridiculous floppy hat that I first saw you in, you'd look like the most horrible gentleman yachtsman at Newport or Cherbourg."

"What do you know about Newport yachtsmen?" said Madison.

By now they were hungry and extremely thirsty. A chart from the cabin showed that several Greek islands lay roughly south of the Hellespont, so they sailed into the choppy Ionian, leaving the Turkish coast behind. The boat pitched alarmingly, but the same wind that stirred the sea also carried them briskly southward. Marta looked pale and she constantly licked her chapped lips, but neither she nor Madison said anything about thirst or fatigue. As the sun began to set, she went downstairs and busied herself with the kitchen equipment until she had worked out a system for boiling salt water and collecting the condensed steam. After dark,

Madison persuaded her to sleep; then he steered happily enough with her curled nearby on some tarpaulins. At dawn, the island-mountain of Samos lay on their port side.

When they docked in the little fishing village of Kokari, Madison -- who had only trousers to wear -- stayed on board, but barefoot Marta managed to sell their boat to a Frenchman who had just disembarked from the Lesbos ferry. She offered him an extraordinary price, so he asked no questions. With the proceeds, she bought clothes and ferry tickets to Athens; and from there they sailed to Brindisi at the southern tip of Italy. On the voyage, they shared favorite anecdotes -- the kind that their old friends had heard countless times before. Madison noticed that Marta told no stories from her late teens or twenties, but he knew better than to probe into forbidden territory. Besides, he censored his memories, too, although mainly to omit tales of a frivolous youth.

As reported, Mussolini had made the Italian railroads run on time, but otherwise even a brief glimpse of fascism alarmed Madison. There were too many imperious soldiers, too many jingoistic headlines in the homogeneous press; and *Il Duce* himself stared arrogantly from every billboard. Europe, it seemed, was ready to let its blood again.

They were glad to enter placid Switzerland. The most direct route would have taken them through Munich, but it seemed prudent to avoid Hitler, so they rode to Vienna and then caught a Czech train for the last leg of their journey. Five days after they had fled Istanbul, they saw the peaked roofs and black spires of Prague.

V

Madison found an apartment through the university, where he was known by his real name and didn't have to show papers. Meanwhile, Marta sold the Alamut knife to an antique dealer -- not obtaining its true value, but still raising enough money to buy new clothes and food for a week. Once Madison had signed their lease, he found Marta at an arranged meeting place. She stood between two baroque saints on the humpbacked Charles Bridge, watching the dark Vlatava pass beneath. It was chilly now in Central Europe, so she wore an open tan trenchcoat, a felt hat, and a black suit with broad shoulders. In every direction, steeples, parapets, and lofty statues reached into the gray sky, and crows flapped past, looking larger and somehow older than the birds of other cities.

They walked to their apartment. Although it was ten minutes away, they never seemed to leave the damp porticoes that lined almost every street. On higher floors, muscular stone figures, blackened by soot, strained to support great baroque entablatures. Madison watched his companion covertly; her raincoat billowed behind her as she strode and her eyes flitted from face to face, door to door.

They entered their apartment through an open courtyard and a wide marble staircase, but the rooms themselves were modest and bare except for a single narrow bed, some rustic furniture, and several crucifixes. Madison peered through wooden blinds at a narrow street: the facade opposite was covered with Victorian frescos.

"I couldn't find Rabbi Halberstam in the phone book," said Marta. She was a study in black and tan against the plaster wall. Not for the first time, Madison was startled by her shortness; she always grew in his recollection.

"Then let's visit what they call the Altneu Synagogue," he said. "There's no more important site in all the world for Jewish magic. According to legend, the golem itself lies in pieces in the attic."

"You'll have to explain to me about that."

"I'll tell you the whole story on the way."

Soon they were back on the street, heading toward the old Jewish quarter. Madison began, "In the sixteenth century, a great